TAUNTON'S APRIL/MAY 1996 NO. 14

A Guide to Artichokes

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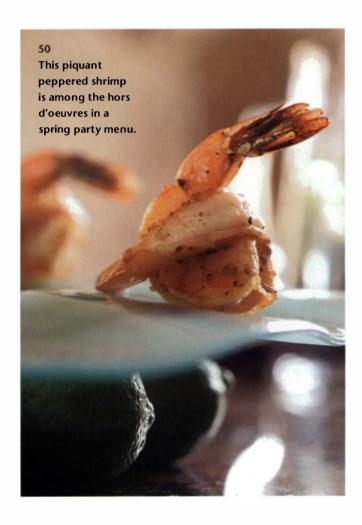












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Cover photo, Alan Richardson. Opposite page: top, PhotoDisc; bottom, Deborah Jones. This page: top, Mark Thomas; below, Carl Duncan.



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The right
techniques
make handling
artichokes easy;
Mediterraneaninspired recipes
make them
delectable.



Fine Cooking welcomes article proposals from our readers. We acknowledge all submissions, return those we can't use, and pay for articles we publish. Send proposals to Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506,

He shares a fondness for home-cured olives

I was gratified to see Angelo Garro's article on homecured olives (Fine Cooking #12, p. 65). Here in Norfolk, I'm far from the ethnic markets of my native New York City; my own pickles and preserves have to provide the full flavors and textures I enjoy so much.

Here is my recipe for curing green olives in wood ash. The potash in the wood ash is what softens the tough green olives and, in my experience, it doesn't add any unpleasant bitterness.

Green Olives in Wood Ash

4 lb. green olives 4 qt. clean hardwood wood ash mixed with about 2 at. water to make a runny paste 2 to 4 bay leaves

> 24 coriander seeds Peel of 1/2 orange, cut in strips

In a large crock, combine the olives and the wood ash. Leave 10 to 12 days, stirring a few times a day, until the flesh of an

olive is easily detached from the pit. Rinse the olives thoroughly, cover with cold water. Let stand 10 days, changing the water every day. Combine the remaining ingredients in a pan, boil for 15 min., cool. Drain the olives, return to them to the crock, cover with cooled brine. Store 1 to 2 weeks before using.

> —Michael D'Angelo, Norfolk, VA

Hung up on gadgets

Only in America could someone strike it rich with a rubber



toilet-tissue tube (I'm referring to the E-Z-Rol garlic peeler featured in Fine Cooking #12, p. 18). This is less a manifestation of our weakness for gadgets than a revealing cultural comment on Americans' puritanical aversion to touching garlic. In Europe, cooks don't mind peeling and chopping garlic, even getting it all over their fingers. What demons do we still need to exorcise?

My low-tech method is to hit the garlic cloves with a brick. The peel pops right off. So what if the skins fly about a bit? Loosen up, America. A super-neat kitchen leaves little room for creativity and fun.

> -Susan Asanovic, Wilton, CT

Chiles don't heat you up—they cool you down

I thought your readers might like to know a little more about the effects of capsaicin, the "heat" compound in chiles.

Capsaicin is a potent releaser of the neurotransmitter serotonin, which lowers body temperature. (It works in tandem with dopamine, which raises body temperature.) The capsaicin causes the brain to command the body to break into a sweat, feel hot, and bring blood to the face. These symptoms help the body dissipate heat quickly, one reason why chiles are frequently eaten

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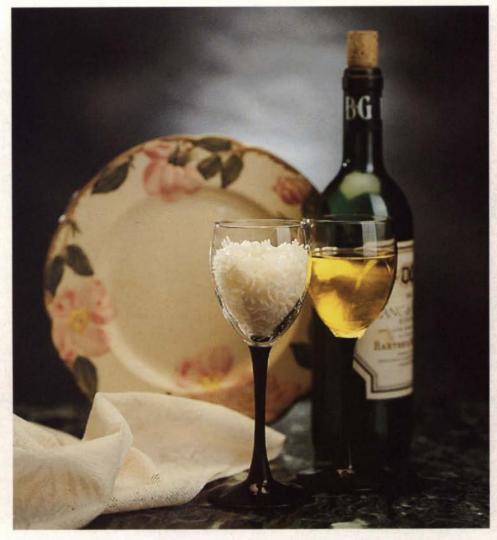
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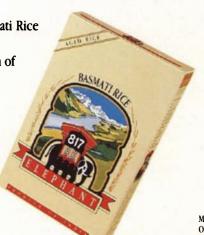
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by people in the tropics.

I've found that drug therapy that increases dopamine and serotonin is extremely helpful in weight loss, control of asthma, relief of psoriasis, and recently, control of craving cocaine, heroin, alcohol, and chocolate in all forms. Researchers have confirmed that the most difficult addiction to control in laboratory mice is the craving for chocolate. They haven't yet tested the potency of a chocolate soufflé vs. a Baby Ruth bar.

> —Pietr Hitzig, MD Timonium, MD

Purslane's a delicacy in New Mexico

I enjoyed reading the article on wild greens in Fine Cooking #8 (p. 54). Here in northern New Mexico, many people consider purslane a late spring and early summer delicacy. We call the plant verdolaga.

Verdolagas have never made it onto the menus of Mexican-American restaurants, perhaps because they grow low to the ground, and harvest can be back-breaking. Another reason may be that many older people associate eating wild plants with the Depression, when families had to forage for food to keep balanced meals on the table.



Here is a local recipe for verdolaga, provided by Manuelita Romero: Pick small purslane plants, before their diameter reaches five inches. Break off the roots and tough stems; break up the plants into bite-sized pieces. Boil the purslane for about five minutes. (This is especially important as the summer wears on and the plants become more bitter.) Sauté some chopped onion in butter. Drain the purslane, add it to the onion and butter, and sauté it briefly, until limp. You can season it only with salt and pepper or throw in a few crushed bits of chile pods as you sauté the purslane.

> —Robin Martin, Santa Fe, NM

A simpler path to lumpless polenta

Your article on polenta (*Fine Cooking* #12, p. 60) offers the method used by almost everyone—stir constantly while

you slowly pour the cornmeal into boiling water. I've found this method to be too time-consuming. I put all the cornmeal into a pot of cold water, turn the stove on high, and stir constantly with a whisk until the water boils. Lumps are never a problem. Once the polenta has come to a boil, I put it in a double boiler, cover, and cook until done, without any more stirring. This method is much less labor-intensive, and the results are consistently good.

> —Bill White, Stuart, FL

Even simpler yet...

The article on polenta in *Fine Cooking #* 12 is great. Now we have new recipes other than the "fried mush" my husband was treated to on Saturday nights as a young boy.

May I suggest, however, boiling two parts water and mixing one part cold water with the cornmeal. Pour it into the boiling water, give it one quick stir, and put the lid on to let the polenta steam. No lumps, no stirring.

—Elsie A. Harley, Seneca, SC

Erratum

The 800 number that was listed for Uwajimaya in Letters, *Fine Cooking #13*, is

for the company's headquarters and should not be used. To order the Benriner slicer or anything else from Uwajimaya, call 206/624-6248.

Not all ripe pears are yellow

I appreciated the interesting article on pears in *Fine Cooking #11*. However, readers could be misled by Sally Small's final paragraph. The author may have been writing of Bartlett pears when she wrote, "When it yellows slightly and yields to the touch at the neck, you will have it: a ripe juicy pear."

Most autumn or winter pears don't change color at all when ripe. This is true of several varieties, including Anjou, Bosc, Seckel, and often Comice. This is very confusing, and our organization has spent many years in an attempt to tell consumers that when a pear yields to gentle pressure at the stem end, it is ripe and ready to eat.

—Maggie André, Oregon Washington California Pear Bureau, Portland, OR ◆



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for fellow enthusiasts

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Asparagus

Spring's most delectable offering is best cooked just until tender

BY SIBELLA KRAUS

very year, late in winter, LI make the hour's drive from my home near San Francisco to the asparagus farms on the Delta islands of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. At this time of year, the rich peat of the bare fields is the color of chocolate, a stark contrast to the already velvety green foothills of nearby Mt. Diablo. As the days grow warmer, the asparagus roots (called crowns) buried in mounded rows of earth send up their green, tender shoots.

One of the most delectable of

spring vegetables, just-picked asparagus has a subtle sweetness and a grassy freshness that is the essence of the new season.

Three colors, one taste. Most asparagus is green, but white and purple varieties are grown, too.

Fat stalks or thin, it's your **choice**. The decision to buy pencil, standard, or jumbo asparagus—the three commercial size classifications is simply a matter of preference. All three can be equally tender. Your foremost concern should be freshness. Whichever size you choose, your asparagus should be a vivid color and have no blemishes or bruises. The buds should be tightly closed, White and green asparagus stalks come from the same plant. The white are grown beneath a cover of soil or straw so that no sunlight reaches them while they grow. The flavor isn't affected, but white asparagus tends to be more fibrous, and so it's often peeled.

> the stalks firm, and the bottoms of the spears should appear freshly cut and

not at all dried out.

Sweet stalks and tender

tips. Long asparagus spears often have a whitish, woody section at the bottom; this is the part of the stalk that was underground. Separate this woody section from the more tender tip by snapping the stalk where it tends to bend. Asparagus sold as tips, usually for a premium price,

10



Asparagus comes in three sizes—pencil, standard, and jumbo—and may be tender no matter which you choose.



The feathery foliage of an asparagus field is bright green in summer, yellow in the fall. The roots, called "crowns," need about three years to produce spears that can be harvested.



Purple asparagus tends to have somewhat sweeter stalks than the green. The purple pigment changes to green, however, when the asparagus is heated.

should not have these woody bottoms. Don't discard too much of the stalk, though; it's usually a little sweeter than the bud.

If you like your asparagus completely tender and fiber-free, buy the fatter spears and, with a sharp knife or a vegetable peeler, remove the fibrous outer skin from the lower part of the spear.

Keep it fresh and cook it quickly. Although modern technology does a good job of preserving freshness, the sooner you eat your asparagus the better it will taste. When you store it, wrap the bottom of the stalks in a damp paper towel, put everything in a ancient Roman saying that serves as a caveat against overcooking these delicate shoots. The best way to cook

Asparagus stalks are usually a little bit sweeter than the buds, so when trimming the spears, don't discard too much of the stalk.

plastic bag, and refrigerate until ready to use.

"In less time than it takes asparagus to cook" is an

asparagus is in plenty of boiling salted water in a large, uncovered pot. Cook just until tender (30 seconds to five

minutes, depending on the thickness of the spears), drain immediately, and then plunge the asparagus into ice water to prevent them from cooking further. The spears are then ready to use, either gently reheated for warm dishes, or at room temperature for salads and others cold dishes.

Sibella Kraus is the executive director of the San Francisco Public Market Collaborative and the Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market.

Q&A

Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Send it to *Fine Cooking*,

PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT

06470-5506, and we'll try to find a cooking professional with the answer.

How to make a vinaigrette that won't break

When I make vinaigrettes, the emulsification seems to be a hit-or-miss proposition. Sometimes the results are smooth, almost creamy; other times the dressing remains thin and separates almost immediately. Why?

—Steve Lopez, Fargo, ND

Amy Cotler replies: Convincing oil and vinegar to bind isn't easy; it's truly a case of oil and water. That's why many vinaigrette recipes include other ingredients that help bind as well as add flavor. These "security" ingredients include heavy cream, condensed milk, raw egg white or yolk, and, perhaps most popular, mustard. These help the dressing hold together, but the most important part of making an emulsified vinaigrette lies in how you add the oil.

To make an emulsified vinaigrette, pour all your acidic and binding ingredients (such as vinegar, fruit juice, lemon juice, and mustard) into a bowl and whisk until combined. Then, whisking constantly, add the oil slowly. The rate of both whisking and adding the oil are very important, you should not

tant: you should not add more oil until what's in the bowl has become bound in the dressing. If you add the oil too quickly, or if the oil isn't incor-

Eggs or mustard can keep a vinaigrette from separating.

porated quickly enough, the dressing will "break" and a smooth emulsion will be impossible. If this happens, pour the dressing into a screw-top jar and shake it just before serving; this will give you a momentary emulsion.

The drizzle-and-whisk process is fairly simple if you use a binding ingredient, but the emulsion will be delicate if it's straight oil and vinegar. If you're making a sizable batch of vinaigrette, you might want to use a blender or food processor and add the oil while the machine is running. I've found, however, that by the time you clean the machine, it would have been just as easy to do it by hand.

Amy Cotler, a cooking teacher and cookbook author specializing in spa cuisine, lives in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Crumble-free pie

My mother-in-law is an expert pie maker who can roll a thin and delicate crust, lift it off the counter, and transfer it to a pie pan intact. She's shown me how to make a crust dozens of times, adding pointers such as using a little ice water, sprinkling flour liberally on the counter, etc. Yet every time I lift my pie crusts, they break into pieces. So how do you roll out a pie crust so it doesn't break apart?

—Marc Vasallo, Santa Fe, NM

Nick Malgieri replies: The tips you've learned are good ones, and it sounds like you aren't far from perfect pie crusts. Here are a couple of scenarios to point you toward a solution:



A perfect pie crust is delicate, yet sturdy enough to handle.

Your dough is undermixed. Pie crusts, with their high concentration of fat. don't need much encouragement to stick together. But if you didn't mix the dough well enough or didn't use enough water, the dough could crumble when you roll it out. Low-water doughs bake very well, but they're difficult to handle. If you see pockets of flour and the dough doesn't hold together when you pinch it between two fingers, you can probably afford to add a little more ice water.

Your dough is overmixed. This is probably the most common pie crust problem. Pie crusts react best when they're all but untouched by warm hands. Heat softens the fat and can make the dough nearly impossible to work with. (It doesn't make for a very tasty crust, either.) Try to use your hands as little as possible and let baking tools—a rolling pin, a rubber spatula, a dough scraper—do most of the work.

You're rolling the dough too thin. Next time you watch your mother-in-law making a pie crust, take a look at how thin her dough really is. Pie crusts should have some durability to them, and odds are she's not rolling a delicate sheet but dough that's a manageable ½8 to ½ inch thick. If you roll pie crust dough too thin, you're

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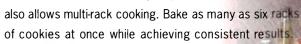
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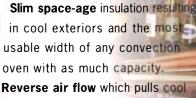
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guaranteed to make a mess. Nick Malgieri is the director of the baking program at Peter Kump's New York Cooking School and the author of How to Bake (Harper Collins, 1995).

A knife that keeps its edge

What kind of knife stays sharp the longest?

> -Laura Engelland, Ft. Worth, TX

Nancy Newman replies: No knife remains sharp indefinitely. Serrated knives stay sharp the longest, but they have very limited uses. The edge of a serrated blade is rough, which helps it grip food and slice as you move the knife back and forth. This makes a serrated knife ideal for slicing bread and tomatoes, but a disaster for raw beef or poultry: it would turn the meat into a shredded mess. Also, it's impossible to chop well with a serrated blade. Chopping and slicing are actions based

on the knife

Serrated knives

stay sharp longest, but a straight blade is more versatile.

The best blades for chopping are wide at the handle, pointed at the tip, and have an 8- to 12-inch-long blade with a V-shaped cutting edge. This design provides the

hitting the cutting board and

sliding through what's being

cut. Serrated knives grip, so

they can't slide, and when

they finally become dull, they

contact with food and work

surfaces and from the acids in

the foods themselves, which

can corrode a knife's edge.

The best knives are made of

stainless steel or a combina-

tion of carbon and stainless

steel. (Carbon steel can be

sharpened to a finer edge than

stainless, but the carbon is

more delicate and it will rust.)

strength that allows you to

Knives become dull from

can't be resharpened.

use the full length of the knife. These knives are usually more expensive, but they last for life when treated well. Nancy Newman is the director of instruction at Peter Kump's New York Cooking School.

How to make homemade yeast

My late grandmother made the most delicious dinner rolls. While we have her recipe, we cannot use it because it calls for "yeast cakes" as the leaven. Do you have any leads to a recipe for yeast cakes? They looked like wedding cookies; however, my father, who once mistook a yeast cake for a wedding cookie, will attest that the similarities stop there.

> -Barbara Wolfe, Asheboro, NC

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Karen Hess replies: I found recipes for various "yeast cakes" in a number of 19th-century cookbooks. Yeast cakes are essentially dried versions of "starter" dough, which doesn't keep well in hot, humid weather.

Some yeast cake recipes call for liquid yeast, and some for another "yeast cake." It is possible, however, to make your grandmother's yeast cakes using prepackaged yeast.

I found the following recipe in Mrs. Porter's New Southern Cookery Book, copyright 1871. The notes in brackets are mine.

Summer Yeast

Boil one pint of hops in one quart water; strain it hot on one pint of flour and one table-

spoonful of salt; stir it well, and cool; [add] half a pint of yeast [you can substitute about a half cake of compressed yeast mixed with a cup of English ale]; let it rise: add as much Indian [corn] meal as will make a stiff dough. Roll into rolls. When they are light, cut them up in thin cakes and dry them in the shade. turning them several times a day. Keep in a dry place. Use to a baking of four two-pound loaves two cakes soaked in tepid water an hour. It is portable and every way desirable for warm weather.

You will likely need to experiment with this recipe to get the ratiosright. Good luck. Karen Hess is a culinary historian and the author of numerous books, including The South Carolina Rice Kitchen—The African Connection (University of South Carolina Press, 1992).

Why cream of tartar makes cookies rise and silver gleam

I've used cream of tartar as a silver polish, but isn't cream of tartar a component in baking powder? Is there a connection between these uses?

—Beatrice Cadallew, Louisville, KY

Shirley O. Corriher replies:

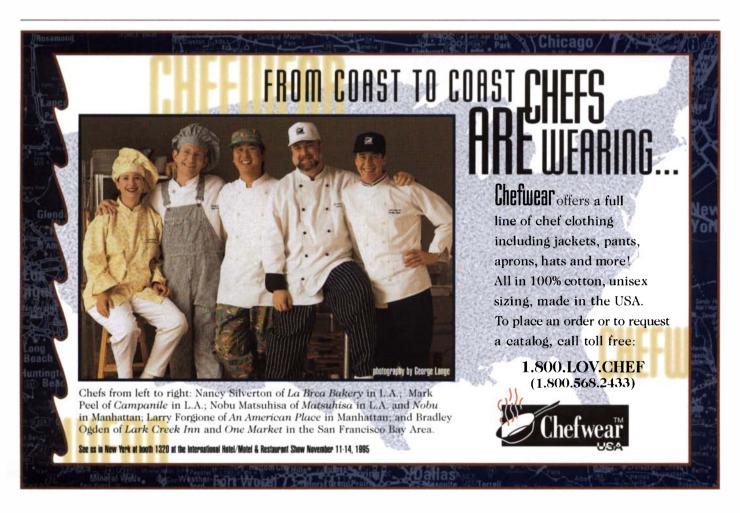
Cream of tartar is a byproduct of winemaking. It's a white residue the wine leaves behind, and it's collected by scraping the inside of the wine barrels. Cream of tartar is a mild acid that reacts with metal, allowing tarnish to be removed. Baking powder is made of baking soda, filler, and one or two mild acids. The acid causes the soda to



Cream of tarter polishes silver and helps baked goods rise.

react, which spurs the rising process. Cream of tartar is sometimes one of those acids, but it's rarely used today; other acids are equally effective and less expensive. Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor for Fine Cooking, teaches food science and cooking

classes across the country. •



APRIL/MAY 1996 15



Convenience without sacrificing flavor. Perfect Addition's frozen stocks compare favorably to homemade.

he primary—some would say the only—reason to use purchased stock, whether it's canned, frozen, or dried, is convenience. But convenience doesn't always have to mean a sacrifice of flavor. Perfect Addition's frozen beef, chicken, fish, and vegetable stocks are both handy and tasty. I tried all of the varieties and recommend them, but having just finished a book on vegetarian cooking, I was most taken with the company's vegetable stock.

I first sampled the vegetable stock by tasting an undiluted spoonful straight from its plastic tub container. I knew this was good stuff when I wanted to keep spooning it up right out of the carton. I restrained myself, but this stock is truly that good. Clear, rich, and sienna-colored, it has the complex flavor of a mix of garden vegetables, including carrots, onions, chard, tomatoes, celery, and mushrooms.

To want to eat a commercially prepared stock straight out of its package is quite a compliment. When I tried the same test on a popular canned vegetable broth, I found salty stock that tasted like acrid onions; its color was a sickly greenish gold. One spoonful was plenty.

Although Perfect Addition vegetable stock includes parsley, garlic, and some spices in its ingredient list, its primary flavor is that of vegetables, which leaves the seasoning to the cook, something I appreciate.

I found that once diluted as instructed by the manufacturer and then used to prepare a soup or stew, the slight

"I knew this was good stock when I wanted to eat it right from the carton."

taste of the tomato that was notable on my first sampling disappeared into the overall flavor of the finished dish—in one case leek and potato soup, in another, vegetable couscous—making this a good multipurpose stock.

Perfect Addition stocks

contain no sugar, starch, MSG, chemicals, preservatives, additives, or added salt. The suggested price for the 8-ounce carton, which makes at least 2 cups of stock, is \$2.75. This may seem a little expensive, but if you don't have time to make stock, the taste Perfect Addition adds to the dish is well worth its price.

You can find Perfect Addition stocks in specialty food markets nationwide; for the store nearest you, call 714/640-0220 or write Perfect Addition, PO Box 9876, Newport Beach, CA 92658-8976. Georgeanne Brennan is the author of several cookbooks, including Potager: Fresh Cooking in the French Style and The Vegetarian Table: France (Chronicle, 1992 and 1995).

A most appealing peeler

The death of my swivel peeler was sudden and unexpected. Without warning, its metal head flew into the garbage pail along with my potato peels. I probably could have glued the thing back together, but that



Love at first peel. The handle's flexibility, stability, and cushioning make peeling potatoes almost fun.

would have meant digging through the garbage to find the blade. I figured I could spare the \$1.98 for a new one.

Instead, I splurged on an Oxo Good Grips peeler. It wasn't the funky look of the matte black rubber handle that made me shell out an extra few bucks, though the tool is mighty attractive. What persuaded me was the way the peeler felt when I held it—as if it were made for my hand alone, as if together we could peel anything, as if I never wanted to let it go.

I exaggerate—but only slightly. The Oxo peeler works so well and is so comfortable that I no longer view potato peeling as purgatorial penance. The razor-sharp blade cuts paper-thin slices smoothly and efficiently. The comfortable handle means your hand won't cramp up while you work.

Oxo has won various design awards for its tools, including one from the Arthritis Foundation. The peeler's fat, oval-shaped handle keeps it from twisting and turning in your hand. Its flexibility protects the small carpal bones in your wrist. Small slits on the sides of the handle bend where your fingers push the hardest, cushioning your fingers and keeping them from slipping.

Oxo also makes scissors, can openers, and a line of high-heat-resistant nylon spoons, spatulas, scrapers, and ladles. All are attractive and dishwasher-safe. Oxo's swivel peeler is sold nationwide for about \$6. For more information, call Oxo International at 212/213-0707. Joanne McAllister Smart is an associate editor for Fine

Cooking. •

16 FINE COOKING



Something you'll never hear when you bake with the butter people have trusted since 1921.





No other frosting cam match the satiny texture of true buttercream.

Rich, sweet, silky-smooth buttercream is a delicious basic staple of the pastry kitchen. It's used as a frosting or filling in so many great pastries, cakes, and confections, and it can be flavored so many ways that it's hard to imagine life—at least my life—without it. Fortunately for me, buttercream is easy to make with a little practice and some good advice.

There are several types of buttercreams, but most use butter, eggs, and sugar. French and Italian buttercreams combine a cooked sugar syrup with beaten egg

The Secret to Silky Buttercream

Use unsalted butter and very fresh eggs for best results

BY CAROLE BLOOM

yolks, egg whites, or whole eggs and softened butter. The less traditional American "buttercream" is simply a combination of confectioners' sugar and butter; it isn't in the same league as its European counterparts.

My favorite buttercream is the classic French version made with a cooked sugar syrup and egg yolks. It's a light, creamy mixture that spreads smoothly and easily. You can make a lighter version using egg whites only, but you won't be able to use any leftover icing: if you try to rebeat it, it will fall apart.

GREAT INGREDIENTS FOR THE BEST BUTTERCREAM

Whichever kind of buttercream you make, it's vital that the few ingredients you use be of top quality.

Buy the best butter you can find. Some brands of butter have less water in them than others. The less water contained in the butter, the lighter your buttercream will be. Always use unsalted butter and don't add salt to your buttercream; salt introduces its own taste that detracts from the taste of the buttercream. Finally, don't forget to check the date for freshness.

The basics of making buttercream



Bring the sugar, water, and cream of tartar to a boil. The cream of tartar helps prevent crystals from forming, as does washing down the sides of the pan with a dampened pastry brush.



When the sugar starts to melt, begin mixing the eggs on medium-high speed for 5 to 8 minutes. They're ready when they hold a slowly dissolving ribbon when the beater is lifted.



Cook the sugar syrup to 242°F—just a tad firmer than the soft ball stage. To test, dip a little of the syrup in ice water and rub it between your fingers; it should form a soft ball.

Use fresh eggs. Though some cooks say older eggs beat fuller, I find that they're less stable and can give the buttercream a flat taste. Don't use egg substitutes: the results will be unpredictable at best.

TIPS TO ENSURE SUCCESS

The technique for making buttercream is fairly straightforward, but there are a few things to keep in mind.

◆ Use an accurate candy thermometer when making the sugar syrup. If the temperature is off, the buttercream melt. It should take about 10 minutes for the syrup to reach the correct temperature. If the eggs have reached the right consistency before the syrup is cooked, turn off the beater; the eggs can hold for about 5 minutes without deflating. Then, before adding the cooked syrup, beat the eggs for a few seconds.

♦ Aim for the space between the bowl and the beater when pouring the sugar syrup into the beaten eggs. If the syrup is poured down the side of the bowl, it or too firm, it will affect the buttercream. Wait until all the heat from the egg-syrup mousse has dissipated before adding the butter, or the butter will melt and you'll need to add more to reach the desired consistency. If the mixture looks curdled after adding all the butter, continue beating for another minute or two; it should become smooth.

FLAVOR TO YOUR LIKING

You can flavor buttercream with melted chocolate, coffee, extracts, liqueurs, fruit purées, candied fruit, nuts, praline, or spices. Add the flavoring at the end of the process, after the buttercream has reached the right texture.

You can make this buttercream ahead. Refrigerate it, tightly covered, for three days, or freeze it for up to four months. Defrost frozen buttercream in the refrigerator for 24 hours and beat it again before using. To rebeat the buttercream, put chunks of it in a bowl and set the bowl in a saucepan of warm water. When the buttercream begins

to melt around the sides and bottom of the bowl, remove the bowl from the water and beat the buttercream on medium speed until it's fluffy, about 2 to 3 minutes.

Classic French Buttercream

Yields 4 cups, enough to ice a 9- or 10-inch layer cake, with some left over for decoration.

1 cup plus 2 Tbs. sugar ½ cup water ½ tsp. (heaping) cream of tartar 2 large eggs, at room temperature 2 large egg yolks, at room temperature 14 oz. (3½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened

OPTIONAL FLAVORS:

- 1 Tbs. instant espresso powder dissolved in 1 Tbs. water
- ♦ 3 Tbs. liqueur, such as cassis, Cointreau, or Chambord
- ◆ 1 to 2 Tbs. extract, such as vanilla or almond
- ♦ 1/3 cup fruit purée
- ½ cup finely ground praline or nuts
- 4 oz. melted and cooled bittersweet, milk, or white chocolate

Carole Bloom, a Europeantrained pastry chef and confectioner, has taught pastry and confectionery classes for more than 16 years.

Add the flavoring at the end, when the buttercream is fluffy and smooth.

may be too firm or too soft. I like the syrup to be just a tad firmer—a couple of degrees higher—than what's known as the soft ball stage (240°F), when the syrup forms a soft

◆ Time your steps. Ideally, the sugar syrup and beaten eggs will be ready at the same time. I start beating the eggs just after the sugar starts to

ball between your fingers.

won't get blended into the egg mixture. If it's poured directly onto spinning beaters, much of it will be flung to the sides of the bowl, where it will harden and be wasted. Beat the egg-syrup mousse until it's cool to the touch, about 8 to 10 minutes. It will thicken considerably as it cools.

◆ Have the butter at room temperature. If it's too soft



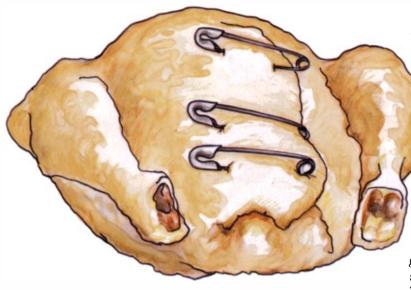
Pour the sugar syrup into the beaten eggs with the mixer speed on low. Then turn the mixer to medium high and beat the mixture until the bowl is cool to the touch, about 8 to 10 minutes.



Beat in the room-temperature butter 2 tablespoons at a time. Continue beating the buttercream until it becomes fluffy and smooth, 2 to 3 minutes.



Add the flavoring in two stages, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula after each addition.



Safety pins hold stuffing in poultry.

Instead of skewering poultry, use safety pins

When you roast a chicken or turkey, it's easier to use large safety pins than skewers to pin the skin over the stuffing. The pins slip out easily after cooking. To wash the pins, drop them in a cup of warm water and ammonia.

—Nadine Phinney, San Ysidro, CA

Waxed paper helps roll out cookie dough

My method for rolling out cookie dough doesn't use excess flour and helps the cookies retain their shape. Flatten the dough, lay it on a piece of waxed paper, and cover with another piece of waxed paper of equal size. With a rolling pin, roll over the paper until the dough is the thickness you want. (Lift the paper frequently during this process to eliminate wrinkles.) Peel off the top piece of paper and cut out the cookies. Replace the paper to keep the dough from drying out, slide the dough onto a baking sheet, and chill until

firm. When ready to bake, slide the chilled dough back onto the counter, carefully peel off the paper and transfer the cookies

to the baking sheet.
—Marianne Michener,
Petaluma, CA

Foil removes "skin" from génoise cakes

To eliminate the tough surface that forms on top of génoise cakes, bake the cake in a pan lined with parchment. When you take the cake out of the oven, lightly press a sheet of foil on top of the cake. When the cake cools. loosen the cake from the edges of the pan and invert the cake onto the counter. Peel off the parchment and then replace it before flipping the génoise once more onto the counter. The foil side should now be facing you. Peel off the foil and the "skin" will go with it, without tearing the cake.

> —Robert Simmelink, Waukesha, WI

Muffin tin quickly firms polenta

When I need firm polenta, I portion it into a nonstick muffin tin. When it firms, I flip the tin over and neat, uniform, individual servings fall out, ready for broiling, grilling, or frying.

—Tony Niro, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

When whisking, a damp towel holds the bowl

Holding a bowl can be tricky when you whisk with one hand and slowly pour an ingredient into the bowl with the other. A damp towel wrapped around the bottom of the bowl goes a long way towards holding the bowl in place.

> —Mary Sullivan, Concord, CA

Reheating pasta, with no sticking

Pasta and its sauce aren't always ready at the same time. When I cook pasta, I drain some of the hot cooking water into a large, heatproof container before completely draining the pasta. I return the pasta to its cooking pot. When I'm ready to serve, I pour a little of the hot water back into the pot with the pasta, stir briefly, and drain the pasta again. In one step, the water will reheat and "unstick" the pasta. I prefer this method to coating the pasta with oil, since the oil adds extra calories and can prevent the sauce from adhering to the pasta.

> —Pamela Staveley, Edgecomb, MA

A thread guides your pastry bag's handwriting

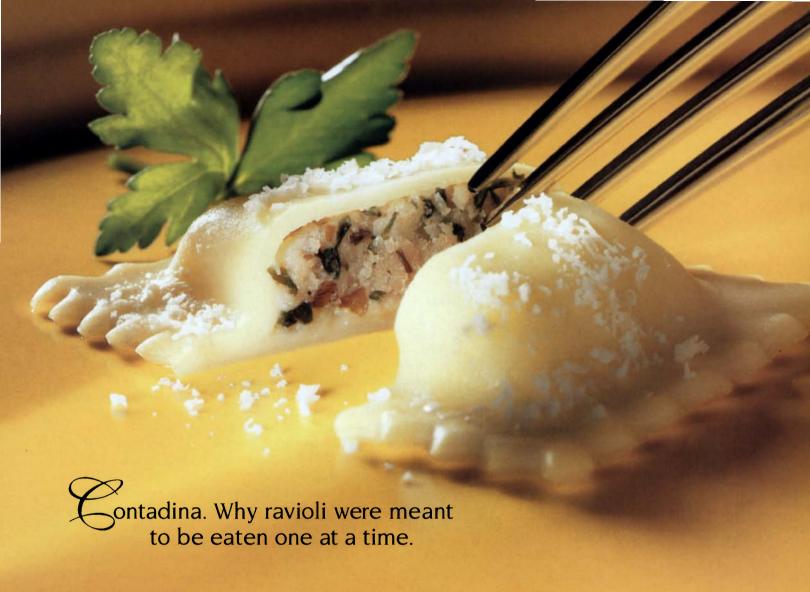
Before you pipe a message in frosting on your cake, gently lay a length of sewing thread over the icing to make a



Lay a thread across your cake as a quide before piping a message.

Do you have a clever way
to peel vegetables, line a
cake pan, or keep herbs
tasting fresh? Write to Tips,
Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506,
Newtown, CT 06470-5506.
You can also send tips by
electronic mail, via America
Online (FINECOOKNG) or
CompuServe (74602,2651).
We pay for tips we publish.

20





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No matter which variety of Contadina ravioli you choose, you'll discover a taste of pure bliss that begs to be savored slowly. Whether it's our new Gorgonzola Cheese & Walnut, Chicken & Rosemary, Beef & Garlic, Light Garden Vegetable or classic Cheese ravioli, each is prepared from an original recipe created by the chefs at Casa Buitoni, the Contadina culinary arts center in Tuscany, Italy.

freshly made for a tenderhearted taste that's hard to resist.

guideline. Write the message just above the line and then gently pull away the thread.

—Lillia Dvarionas, Kamata, Ontario

Cheap, handy kitchen clips

Binder clips, which are available in office-supply stores, are a big help around the kitchen. They make great closures for bagged foods and pastry bags, can hold recipe cards on the stove vent hood, and will clip papers onto refrigerator magnets.

—Russell Shumaker, Richmond, VA



Binder clips make handy closures.

Wood scraper gives icing a smooth finish

For finishing icing on the sides of a cake, I depend on a 6-inch scraper, which you can buy in hardware stores or at

lumberyards. It's smaller than a spatula and much easier to hold straight.

I position the scraper perpendicular to the side of the cake and hold it gently as I rotate the cake's turntable. The scraper also works beautifully on square and triangular cakes, as it can make sharp, perfect corners.

—Krista Stanley, Mt. Kisco, NY

Preserving chiles easily

To keep the chiles from your garden all winter, just wash them, drop them in a glass canning jar, and cover them with distilled vinegar. Refrigerated, the chiles will keep indefinitely.

—Susan Asanovic, Wilton, CT

Use colored glass bottles to store oils

Since oils can become rancid more quickly when exposed to light, I use "designer" water bottles made of colored glass to store oils. The pint-sized bottles are perfect for flavored oils, and I use quart bottles for general-purpose oils, such as olive and peanut. For easy pouring, I fit the bottles with color-coded plastic pour spouts, which are available at restaurant-supply or liquor stores.

—Bill Moran, San Diego, TX



Use a 6-inch scraper to give your icing a smooth finish.



Proofing bread at home

My kitchen doesn't have just the right warm place for proofing (the first rise of bread dough), so I came up with this method.

Bring 2 cups of water to a boil in a 2-quart pot. Remove the pot from the heat, invert the pot's lid on the top of the pot, and lay a potholder on the inverted lid. Put the dough in a mixing bowl, balance the bowl on the inverted lid, and cover with a dishtowel. The water releases its heat gradually and keeps the dough at an ideal proofing temperature.

You can also control the temperature by the thickness of the potholder: the thicker the potholder, the slower the proofing.

—David Kailin, Corvallis, OR

When you marinate, make your own vacuum seal

For fast and easy marinating, all you need is a zip-top bag and a straw. Mix the marinade in the bag and add the food. Seal the bag, leaving one corner open. Insert about ½ inch of the straw into the

Create the right environment for proofing bread.

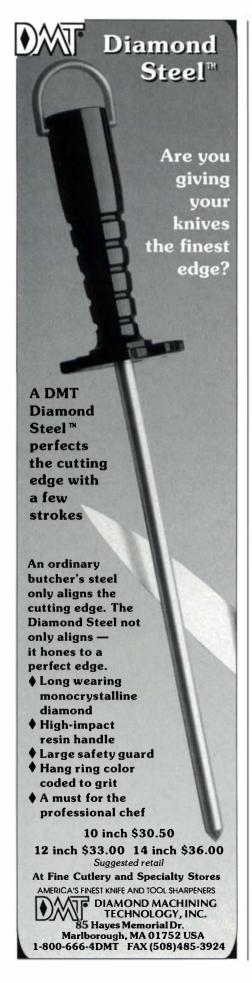
bag and gently inhale on the straw. As you create a vacuum, the marinade will draw up around the food. When the marinade nears the top, quickly pull out the straw and seal the bag. You'll need less marinade, use less space in your refrigerator, and have less to clean up.

—Sally Gray-Nottage, Kailua-Kona, HI

Pillowcase becomes salad spinner

If you don't have a salad spinner, you can make your own with an old cotton pillowcase and a little centrifugal force. Put the rinsed greens in the pillowcase and take them outside. Grasp the end of the case in one hand and spin the case in a windmill-like motion next to your body. In about 30 seconds—just before your arm gets tired—the greens will be dry and the pillowcase will be damp. It looks a little silly, but it's incredibly efficient, especially when you're making large amounts of salad.

> —Mark Petroni, Weston, CT ◆



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FLAVORINGS



Aromatic Allspice

Not a blend, but a single spice with a sweet-peppery appeal

BY ROBERT WEMISCHNER

Allspice has long suffered from an identity crisis. Spanish explorers who found the spice in the West Indies thought allspice berries looked like peppercorns and so called

them *pimenta*, their word for pepper. As it turned out, allspice isn't related to pepper at all, but nonetheless the spice is known as *pimento* throughout much of the world.

Calling the berries "allspice" isn't much of an improvement. The name refers to the spice's flavor, which is often likened to a combination of nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon. Many people who have only encountered the spice in its ground form as-

sume that it's a blend.

The slightly sweet,
slightly piquant flavor of allspice means
that it can be used both in
sweet dishes, such as
cakes and puddings, and
in savory foods, from seafood
to meat and charcuterie.

BUY WHOLE BERRIES AND GRIND AS NEEDED

Allspice is sold whole and ground. For the freshest flavor, buy whole berries and grind as needed in a pepper mill, a spice grinder, or a mortar and pestle. If necessary, pass the spice through a fine sieve to remove any of the shell that resists grinding. Whichever form you buy, store allspice in a tightly closed glass jar in a cool, dark place, as you would any other spice. Whole berries will remain aromatic for up to two years. Use the ground spice within six months.

THE BEST ALLSPICE COMES FROM JAMAICA

Allspice is grown throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, but the allspice from Jamaica is considered the very best. The berries there have a higher oil content and a more pungent flavor than those grown elsewhere.

The allspice plant is an evergreen tree that's a member of the myrtle family. When mature but still green, the berries are picked by hand, dried in the sun for

about a week, cleaned, and packed for export.

A SUPPORTING PLAYER WITH AN INTERNATIONAL REPERTOIRE

Few recipes call for allspice to be used alone or as the primary flavoring. Instead, you'll find it combined with other spices to make highly aromatic dishes. Allspice is used in spice rubs, marinades, and pickling brines in cuisines as diverse as those of Europe, Africa, the Mideast, and the Caribbean.

In Scandinavia, a generous scattering of whole allspice berries adds piquancy to many herring dishes. In its native

Allspice's flavor resembles a combination of nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon.

Jamaica, allspice stars in jerk, the island's specialty spice rub in which smoke and spice come together to flavor grilled pork, chicken, and fish. Allspice is also part of the Moroccan spice blend *ras el hanout*, as well as the fiery Ethiopian spice paste called *berberé*.

In the Mideast, stews, pilafs, and *kibbeh*, those ovals of ground lamb and cracked wheat, are often seasoned with allspice. Traditional English desserts such as plum puddings and mincemeat pies usually get a pinch of allspice, as do many spice cookies and cakes.

Robert Wemischner is the author of The Vivid Flavors Cookbook (Lowell House/Contemporary Books, 1994).

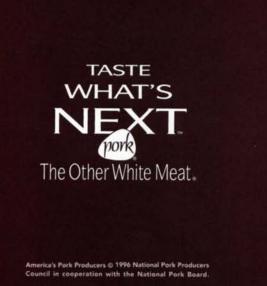


CUT LOOSE.



So you've got a pork chop. Why stop there? Cut cubes for stews or kabobs or sauté and-dip appetizers. Strips for fajitas or stir-fry or salads or satay. Thin cutlets to sauté or braise quickly. Any cut of pork can be shaped to fit your recipe. All it takes is a sharp knife and a little imagination. For recipes, send a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope to: Recipes Ad, Box 10383, Des Moines, IA, 50306. Or visit us at http://www.nppc.org/



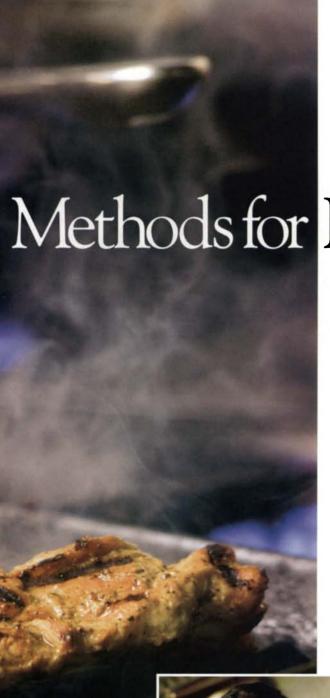












Try it grilled with mustard and rosemary, sautéed with spiced tomatoes, or roasted with apples and herbs

Methods for Pork Tenderloin

BY RAJI JALLEPALLI

t my restaurant, I serve a four-course dinner menu that changes nightly. Often I choose to serve pork as the main dish, specifically pork tenderloin. I favor the tenderloin over other cuts of pork because it cooks quickly, renders little fat, and its subtle flavor and buttery-soft texture complement my lighter-styled accompaniments, such as vegetable purées in place of gravy. What I like best about pork tenderloin, however, is its versatility. The cut is delicate enough to showcase subtle flavorings, such as a simple rub of ginger, but it's hearty enough to stand up to a peppery spice rub or a curry-based sauce.

People are sometimes surprised to see pork tenderloin on my menu because in India, where I was born, many people don't eat pork. But because my cooking is not Indian, but a fusion of Indian flavors and classic technique, and because I have no religious objections to pork, and—most important—

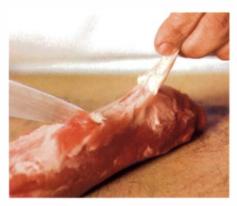
A pairing of pork and pasta. Slices of the honey-mustardrosemary pork top pasta tossed with steamed vegetables for a dish full of flavor and color.

The scent of rosemary fills the kitchen as this butterflied pork tenderloin gets quickly grilled.

"What I like best about pork is its versatility," says author Raji Jallepalli, right.







Be careful when trimming the tenderloin so you don't cut away any precious meat. Use a sharp knife to cut and your fingers to gently pull off any thick pieces of fat.

Pull away any thin membranes and cut the silverskin cleanly from the meat. The silverskin shrinks when heated and might cause the tenderloin to cook unevenly.



because the pork tenderloin produced in America is so tender, moist, and juicy, I feature it regularly.

I cook and serve the tenderloin in different ways, sautéing it one night and presenting it as medallions atop a spicy vegetable purée, marinating and grilling it another, or roasting it to serve with a fruit chutney. Though I think pork tenderloin is special enough to serve at my restaurant, it's so quick and easy to prepare that you can easily serve it at home.

A LITTLE TRIMMING, A LITTLE SEASONING, AND IT'S READY TO GO

The tenderloin, which is part of the loin, comes from a well-protected part of the pig, located under the backbone on the inside of the animal's ribs. In general, those muscles that see little movement are most tender, and the tenderloin hardly moves at all. Long, thin, boneless, and covered with little fat, the tenderloin may have a slightly less intense flavor than some bone-in cuts, but as its name implies, this cut is the most tender. Pork tenderloin is a more expensive cut, averaging \$6 per pound, but because it has no bone and little fat, there's very little waste.

Look for color and consistency when buying pork. The flesh should be moist and firm and a deep pink, not gray or red; the fat should be creamy white. Avoid very wet packages, which may signal that the pork was handled badly.

Use a sharp knife to trim the fat. Because pork tenderloin can be expensive, keep as much of it intact as possible. When trimming the fat, pull on it until you can separate it from the meat, and then use a very sharp knife to cut away the fat. The silverskin—a thin, tough, translucent membrane that's somewhat silver in color—covers much of the tenderloin. It tends to shrink when heated and can cause the meat to cook unevenly, so remove it as

well. Use the tip of a sharp knife to get under the silverskin and then gently pull it away from the meat with your fingers. Use the knife to cut the silverskin away from the meat where it is stubborn.

Any way you slice it, it's still delicious. You can cook the tenderloin whole or butterfly it to get a flatter piece of meat. To butterfly, hold the knife so the blade is parallel to the cutting board. Make a lengthwise slit down the tenderloin without cutting all the way through. When you open the tenderloin like a book, the meat should be an even thickness, ready to season and cook as it is or to stuff, roll, tie, and roast.

You can also cut rounds of meat, or medallions, from the whole tenderloin. Medallions ½ to ¾ inch thick cook very quickly. For thinner pieces, pound the medallions between two pieces of waxed paper with a meat pounder or mallet. These superthin pieces cook in just a few minutes; watch them carefully so that they don't overcook.

Chunks of tenderloin make fine kebabs, while thin strips work well for quick sautés in a wok or skillet. Serve them with rice or pasta.

Season before cooking for best flavor. The ten-

der flesh of pork tenderloin has a very mild flavor, which is why you need to season the pork before cooking it. At the very least, I give the tenderloin a generous sprinkling of salt and pepper, but usually I marinate it or rub on a mix of spices.



ROAST IT, GRILL IT, SAUTÉ IT— JUST DON'T OVERCOOK IT

I often cook the tenderloin whole. I season the pork, sear it on all sides in a heavy pan on the stove, and put it in a 350°F oven for about ten minutes. I let it rest a few minutes after cooking and slice it into medallions. At the restaurant I sometimes sear it, broil it for just a few minutes, and let it finish cooking from its own heat outside the oven. This is a surefire way to guarantee that you won't overcook the tenderloin, but it takes a little practice to get the timing right.

I also like to grill tenderloin. You may want to grill chunks on a skewer, or grill a butterflied tenderloin so that it will cook through without overcooking the outside. Another very quick way to cook pork tenderloin is to sauté medallions or cutlets in a hot skillet. I give them just a brief turn in the pan.

Cook the meat until it's pink—not gray. Pork dries out easily during cooking because the fat encircles the flesh rather than marbling it as it does in beef, but overcooking is the real culprit behind a tough tenderloin. Most people have been conditioned to expect tough pork, so they're surprised at

Punch up the flavor
Cooked medallions of of pork tenderloin

Cooked medallions o pork are kept warm in a sauce of cuminscented tomatoes.

A sprinkling of cilantro leaves brightens this pretty dish.

Punch up the flavor of pork tenderloin with a variety of seasonings. Here the author rubs a mixture of garlic, chile, cumin, and turmeric onto medallions cut from the tenderloin. how tender and juicy mine is. It's really no secret how I make it that way—I just don't overcook it.

Pork used to have to be cooked until very well done in order to avoid any risk of trichinosis. Unfortunately that has given pork its undeserved reputation for beingdry and stringy. According to The Pork Industry Group, modern methods of pork production have virtually eliminated trichinosis. And in the uncommon instance where trichina is present, scientists say that cooking the pork to 137°F is sufficient to kill it. The USDA still cautions against eating undercooked pork, but that doesn't mean you need to turn it an awful shade of gray to be sure it's safe. Cook the pork just until it's pale pink inside and you'll have a juicy, delicious tenderloin that's safe to eat. Check for doneness by cutting a small slit near the thicker center of the tenderloin: the flesh should be pale pink, and the juices should run clear.

If you feel more comfortable knowing the actual temperature, use an instant-read thermometer (a traditional meat thermometer is too big for the slen-

der tenderloin) and insert it at the thickest part. The USDA and the pork industry still recommend cooking pork to 160°F, but the FDA has lowered that guideline to 150°, which will give you juicier meat. If you go by temperature, take the tenderloin off the heat when it's five degrees below the desired temperature; it will continue to cook in its own heat.

You don't need to cook pork tenderloin until it's gray—proper cooking will make it safe, tender, and juicy.

Once you get the idea of how easy pork is to cook, you'll want to experiment with your own spices rubs, marinades, and accompaniments.

Pork Tenderloin with Cumin-Scented Tomatoes

For the best cumin flavor, grind whole cumin seeds to make a powder. Serves four.

3 cloves garlic, chopped
One hot fresh chile pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped fine
1 tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. coarse salt
2 Tbs. canola oil; more for cooking
One 16-oz. pork tenderloin, trimmed, silverskin removed, and cut into ¾-inch-thick medallions

FOR THE TOMATOES:

2 Tbs. canola oil
1 small onion, chopped fine
1/4 tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. crushed cumin seeds
1 tsp. coarse salt
2 Tbs. white wine (optional)

2 large tomatoes (or about 5 plum tomatoes), chopped coarse (about 3 cups)

½ cup coarsely chopped cilantro leaves for garnish (optional)

In a small bowl, combine the garlic, chile pepper, cumin, turmeric, salt, and oil. Rub this mixture onto the pork

medallions. Let the medallions sit at room temperature while you prepare the tomatoes.

Heat 2 Tbs. canola oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, turmeric, cumin, and salt; stir for about 1 min. until mixed. Add the wine and let the mixture cook gently over medium-low heat until it turns a light brown, about 7 min. Add the tomatoes and cook gently, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are tender but not mushy, about 15 min. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Heat about 1 Tbs. canola oil in a frying pan over medium-high heat. Sear the medallions until lightly browned, about 2 min. per side. Lower the heat to medium; continue cooking until the insides of the medallions are pink and the flesh feels firm, about 5 min.

Spoon a few tablespoons of the tomatoes onto a plate or shallow bowl. Arrange three or four slices of pork on top, sprinkle with cilantro leaves, and serve immediately.

Pork Tenderloin with Honey, Mustard & Rosemary

Butterflying the tenderloin gives you a larger surface for the marinade to penetrate and allows you to grill or broil the meat guickly,

keeping it moist and tender. You can also saute medallions in a skillet or roast the whole tenderloin as described in the other recipes. *Serves four.*

2 Tbs. honey

2 Tbs. mustard

Two 4-inch sprigs fresh rosemary, stems removed, and needles crushed slightly to release flavor

1 tsp. salt

1 Tbs. crushed black pepper

1 Tbs. black mustard seeds (optional)

2 Tbs. olive oil

One 16-oz. pork tenderloin, trimmed, silverskin removed, and butterflied

Combine the honey, mustard, rosemary, salt, pepper, black mustard seeds, and olive oil in a shallow dish large

enough to hold the pork tenderloin. Add the tenderloin, turn to coat, and marinate it for at least 1 hour.

Heat the grill or broiler. Cook the pork until golden brown on all sides and firm to the touch, about 12 to 15 min. total cooking time. Let the tenderloin rest on a cutting board for a few minutes, cut it on the diagonal into thin slices, and serve.

Pork Tenderloin with Apple Chutney

Apples, a traditional accompaniment to pork, get spiced up with toasted black pepper and allspice. *Serves four*.

1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger

2 tsp. salt

2 Tbs. canola oil; more for cooking

One 16-oz. pork tenderloin, trimmed and silverskin removed

FOR THE APPLE CHUTNEY:

1 Tbs. olive oil

2 apples, peeled, cored, and chopped into ½-inch dice

1 tsp. toasted, ground black pepper

½ tsp. ground allspice

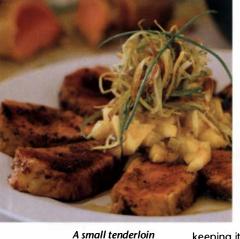
1 tsp. chopped fresh tarragon; more for garnish

Mix the ginger, salt, and 2 Tbs. canola oil together in a small bowl. Gently rub the pork with the ginger mixture and set it aside.

Heat 1 Tbs. olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the apples, pepper, and allspice. Cook until the apples are tender, about 5 min. Add the tarragon and cook another 1 min.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Heat 1 Tbs. canola oil in an ovenproof, heavy-based skillet over medium-high heat. Sear the tenderloin on all sides, browning it, about 2 min. Add a little more oil to the pan, if needed. Put the pork in the oven and roast, turning it occasionally, until cooked through, 10 to 15 min. It should be pink inside, and its juices should run clear. Let the tenderloin rest for a few minutes on a cutting board. Slice it thin and serve it with a few tablespoons of the apple chutney.

Raji Jallepalli cooks pork tenderloin tenderly at Raji, her restaurant in Memphis, Tennessee. ◆



makes a perfect dinner for two. An allspice-flavored apple chutney is quick to make and a perfect complement to the ginger rub on the meat. A garnish of quickly fried leeks adds texture and flavor.

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Wine Choices

Pork's changeable character works with whites and reds

a chameleon. Ovenroasted or mesquite-grilled,
dressed up with a berry glaze
and dried-cherry stuffing,
slathered with barbecue sauce,
or laced with strong herbs such
as rosemary and bay leaf, pork
takes on enough character to
warrant a red wine: anything
from a Beaujolais to a mediumweight Zinfandel. Both of these
work well with the honey, mustard, and rosemary recipe above,

Pork can be quite

standing up to its darkly caramelized grilled surface and its mustard-rosemary seasoning.

But treat pork delicately, as in the other two recipes, and you'll probably prefer a white wine alongside it. That's the tradition, in fact, with the porkbased cuisines of Germany and Alsace, where Gewürztraminers and Rieslings rule.

Both these wines are ideal here. Lively, fruity, floral, and easy to like, they can vary guite a bit in sweetness. The ones from Alsace, notably Trimbach and Hugel, tend to be completely dry; German bottlings from the Rhine and Mosel valleys have noticeable sugar, which helps temper the chile-pepper spice in the recipe for pork with cuminscented tomatoes. Gewürztraminer, moreover, has a delightfully spicy edge that adds to its complexity. The spice also helps to tie the wine to the cumin, allspice, ginger, and black pepper

that season these two dishes.

You can find excellent examples of Rieslings and Gewürztraminers made on this side of the Atlantic: California's Navarro, Chateau St. Jean, and Fetzer (in order of increasing sweetness and decreasing price) are all worth seeking out.

—Rosina Tinari Wilson is a food and wine writer and teacher based in the San Francisco area. She is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking.

Ben Fink

Garlic Goes from Gentle to Gutsy

Change the flavor by changing the cooking method

BY BOB KINKEAD

n my family, to know garlic is to love garlic. My year-old grandson has already made this discovery: he gnaws on raw garlic like candy. To me, the scent of garlic is the aroma of great food to come. I roast garlic to make its pungency turn sweet and use it to flavor roasted chicken. I extract garlic's essence by simmering it in oil. Caesar salad isn't complete without garlic's bite, and I can't count how many of the dishes at my restaurant begin with sautéing chopped garlic.

FRESH GARLIC IS A MONTH OLD

Fresh garlic grows in bulbs, or heads. A bulb is actually composed of twenty to thirty smaller units, called cloves. The entire bulb is covered by a papery skin, as is each clove. This wrapping gives fresh garlic a reputation for being difficult to handle, but as I'll show later, this isn't the case.

All peeled garlic is white, but the skins can be white, purple, or red. White-skinned garlic is the most common and the strongest in flavor. Purpleand red-skinned varieties are a little milder and have a somewhat shorter shelf life.

The garlic cure. All garlic sold in grocery stores is at least a month old; just-picked garlic isn't suitable for shipping or storing. After garlic is harvested, it



must be cured—a one-month drying and aging process in which moisture evaporates and prevents the garlic from rotting. As the garlic cures, its flavor also develops and strengthens, and its outer skin takes on its characteristic papery feel.

A good bulb of garlic. Choose garlic bulbs that feel firm and heavy for their size, with no sign of shriveling, mold, or sprouting.

Garlic will continue to grow stronger in flavor for about two months after curing. If a bulb is past its peak, it begins to shrivel; that's when the garlic's flavor weakens and becomes bitter. Garlic keeps best



Start to peel garlic by breaking up the bulb. Set the garlic head upside down on the counter and use your palm to press down hard on the root end. All the garlic cloves will break free, ready to be peeled.

in a cool, dark, dry place with plenty of ventilation. Don't refrigerate garlic: this promotes rot.

Occasionally, garlic will germinate and produce green sprouts, which taste bitter if eaten raw. If the cloves are still firm, however, the garlic is fine. To get rid of the sprout, just cut the clove in half through the center of the sprout and peel each sprout half away from the clove.

PEELING GARLIC IS NO BIG DEAL

Easy garlic peeling begins by breaking up the garlic bulb. Turn the bulb so that the pointed shoot end faces the counter and press down hard on the bulb's

root end with the palm of your hand. The bulb will break up nicely into individual cloves.

Several garlic-peeling gadgets are on the market, but my favorite method needs only a chef's knife. When you press on the clove with the flat side of the knife, the peel will crack easily. If

you press hard enough, this method also gives you a head start on breaking up the clove for chopping.

If you need several whole, peeled cloves, microwave them for 30 seconds, or drop them into boiling water for 45 seconds. Let them cool briefly, and then just pinch each clove to pop it from its peel.

One word of caution: don't put lots of garlic skins in your garbage disposal. This helpful hint was gleaned from the experience of having my sink back up at home one Thanksgiving.

CHOPPING GARLIC, BY KNIFE OR BY PRESS

I don't think it makes any difference whether garlic is chopped or put through a garlic press. I don't often use a press because it can only handle one or two



You don't need gadgets to peel a garlic clove. Just set a clove on the counter, lay the side of a chef's knife on the clove, and press. A gentle press cracks the peel; a firmer push breaks up the clove itself and gives you a head start on chopping.

Don't stop until it's finely chopped. Larger chunks of garlic will burn before they release enough of their flavor.

cloves at a time, and the press will waste some of the garlic. The tool I don't recommend for chopping garlic is a food processor; the machine will knock the cloves around and nick them up, but it won't give you the fine chop that you need.

Chop it, and chop it fine. Chopping garlic is one of those basic kitchen skills that actually requires a bit of precision because the cloves are relatively small, and they need to be finely diced to release all their flavor. Also, it's unpleasant to bite into a coarse chunk of raw garlic, and chunks don't sauté well. Coarsely chopped garlic burns before it can fully release its flavor, and the flavor of burned garlic can

permeate an entire dish.

It's easiest to chop garlic with a good-quality chef's knife. Don't try to chop with a paring knife; it's an awkward tool for the task.

Slice the clove lengthwise as thin as you can and then give it a quarter turn and slice it thin again. Chop this pile of tiny garlic

cubes as fine as possible. The garlic will tend to fan out as you chop; just use your knife to scrape it back into a pile and continue chopping.

GARLIC'S FLAVOR DEPENDS ON HOW YOU COOK IT

The scent of garlic is

the aroma of great

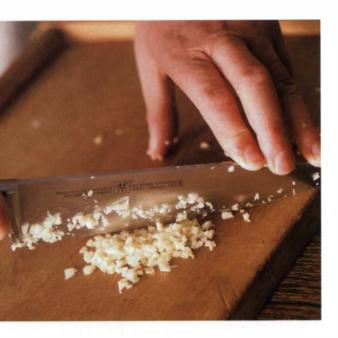
food to come.

There are basically five ways to cook with garlic—you can use it raw, sauté it, blanch it, roast it, and use it as an infused oil. Each provides a distinct taste and range of flavor.

Raw garlic. Use raw garlic when you want the most flavor in the smallest amount. It also has the most "bite"—and the strongest effect on the breath.

Sautéed garlic. Just the scent of garlic sautéing in oil or butter whets my appetite. The fat's heat

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You can also make garlic-flavored oil by braising whole cloves of peeled garlic in olive oil in a low oven (250° to 275°) until the garlic just starts to brown, about 1 hour. This also produces delicious garlic cloves; the slow cooking leaves them soft and delicious, and they can be used the same way you'd use roasted garlic.

GARLIC, TRUE AND FALSE

My love for garlic does not extend to prepared garlic products. Dehydrated garlic and garlic powder are fresh garlic's evil twins: they're harsh, acrid, and chemical-tasting. To my palate, chopped garlic stored in oil tastes old, and there's some debate as to whether it can harbor botulism. Even commercially peeled garlic is suspect: it never has the same freshness that comes from mincing a just-peeled clove.

While we're on the subject of garlic impostors, I don't think much of elephant garlic, either. Both

Catalan potatoes slide from pan to plate. This rustic potato dish uses both sautéed garlic and garlic-infused oil, but the overall effect is a just hint of garlic flavor.

activates the garlic's flavor compounds and carries the flavor through the entire dish.

Sautéed garlic needs hot fat, but not too hot; smoking-hot fat will scorch garlic. Add pressed or finely chopped garlic to the hot oil and begin stirring immediately. As soon as you can smell the garlic, add the next ingredient in the dish; this lowers the fat's temperature and keeps the garlic from burning.

Blanched garlic. Blanching garlic means boiling whole cloves in one or more changes of water. This removes much of the garlic's "bite" for a more subtle flavor—and it means less possibility of garlic breath. Blanched garlic is great for subtly flavored dressings or for dishes in which you want whole pieces of garlic. Puréed blanched cloves can be used to thicken sauces.

To blanch garlic, use cloves that are peeled, whole, and intact. Toss them into a nonaluminum pan with cold water, bring it to a boil, and drain. Repeat the process. The more the garlic is blanched, the milder its flavor becomes.

Roasted garlic. Roasting garlic gives it a sweet, nutty flavor and makes it so soft that it can be used as a spread on grilled bread.

You can roast garlic by the bulb or the clove. In either case, the garlic should be left unpeeled. Lightly coat bulbs or cloves in olive oil and slowly roast them in a 325°F oven for 45 minutes. The garlic should be browned, not burned. When done, the garlic will be soft enough to squeeze out of its peel.

Garlic-infused oil. Adding whole, peeled garlic cloves to olive oil and cooking it over moderate heat flavors the oil with garlic. The cloves are usually discarded, but the oil is great for cooking. Garlic oil has a mild garlic flavor with no overpowering bite, and it's particularly good for cooking seafood and making pasta sauces that need subtle garlic flavor.



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Roasted garlic is golden, sweet, and soft. When you roast garlic in a slow oven for an hour, its flavor is transformed from pungent to gentle.

This chicken owes its flavor to garlic under the skin. Roasted garlic cloves are puréed with butter and lemon zest; the mixture is then rubbed under the chicken's skin. The result is fork-tender meat that's full of flavor.

GARLIC WILL STICK TO YOUR BREATH, BUT NOT TO YOUR HANDS

In the interest of fair disclosure, I must draw attention to the aspect of garlic that makes would-be garlic lovers wilt: garlic breath.

• Garlic odor doesn't originate from the mouth or tongue. The sulfuric compounds that give garlic its scent and flavor get into the blood and lungs, much as alcohol does. • Time is the only remedy for garlic breath, but chewing parsley sprigs or fennel seeds will mask it.

Washing your hands

with lemon juice and salt will kill the scent

of garlic, as will rub-

bing your hands in

used coffee grounds.

true garlic and elephant garlic are members of the allium family, but elephant garlic is more closely related to the side that produces leeks. Elephant garlic has a much milder flavor and little of the same fragrant impact that inspires garlic lovers.

Caesar Salad Dressing

This dressing needs only romaine lettuce to make a classic salad. The dressing should be quite thick. *Yields about* $\frac{2}{3}$ *cup.*

2 anchovies, minced
1 egg yolk
1 clove garlic, minced
2 Tbs. grated Parmesan
1 Tbs. red-wine vinegar
1 Tbs. lime juice
1 tsp. Dijon mustard
1/4 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
2 dashes Tabasco
1/2 tsp. salt; more to taste
1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

In a food processor, blender, or by hand, whisk together the anchovies, egg yolk, garlic, Parmesan, vinegar, lime juice, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, Tabasco, salt, and pepper. With the machine still running or while whisking, slowly add the olive oil. Taste for salt and pepper.

Catalan Potatoes

These potatoes get a generous dose of garlic from both chopped garlic and garlic-infused oil. If you cook this dish in a nonstick pan, you can use less oil. *Serves six*.

 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup for nonstick pans)

- 3 whole cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 large Spanish onion, diced
- 2 large Idaho potatoes (about 1 lb. total), peeled and sliced ¼-inch thick
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped fine
- 4 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced
- 1 tsp. salt; more to taste
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste



Heat an 8- or 9-inch skillet over medium heat. Pour in the olive oil and add the whole garlic cloves. Cook the garlic until browned, about 8 min. Discard the cloves.

Add the diced onion to the pan. Sauté in the oil until light brown, about 12 min. Remove the onions from the pan with a slotted spoon.

Add half of the potato slices to the oil. Top them with an even layer of the onions, chopped garlic, tomatoes, salt, and pepper. Top with the remaining potato slices.

Cook the potatoes until browned, about 15 min., and then turn the potatoes over, pressing down on them with a spatula. (You don't have to turn all the potatoes at once; the potato cake will still keep its shape.) Continue cooking until the underside is brown and the potatoes are tender throughout, about another 15 min. Slide from the pan onto a serving platter and serve immediately.

Garlic Roast Chicken

This makes an incredibly moist chicken. The lemonygarlic flavor permeates every bit of the meat. Serves four, with 1 cup sauce.

20 whole cloves garlic, peeled

1/4 cup olive oil

1/4 lb. unsalted butter, at room temperature

¾ tsp. salt

½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

1 Tbs. chopped fresh tarragon

2 lemons

One 3½-lb. chicken

1 bunch flat-leaf parsley (including stems), chopped coarse





2 carrots, chopped 1 large onion, chopped 3 ribs celery, chopped ½ lb. mushrooms, trimmed and quartered 1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock 3 Tbs. Madeira

Heat the oven to 250°F. Put the garlic cloves and olive oil in an ovenproof container and roast for 1 hour; the cloves should be very soft. Remove the garlic cloves from the oil and set them aside to cool for about 15 min.; reserve the oil. Turn up the oven to 375°.

Put the garlic cloves, butter, salt, and pepper in a food processor; purée until smooth. Transfer the garlic butter to a bowl; stir in the tarragon. Allow the butter to cool to about the same temperature as the chicken, but don't let it harden.

Grate the zest from one of the lemons and then juice it; set the zest and juice aside. Cut the other lemon into ¼-inch slices.

Stuff the chicken with garlic butter—Rinse the chicken inside and out; pat dry. Start loosening the skin over the breast with your fingers. Go slowly and carefully to avoid tearing the skin. Work your fingers all the way to the thigh joint.

Scoop up some of the garlic butter with your fingers and begin smearing it under the skin, starting at the furthest point in the chicken and working your way toward the front. Be sure you get the butter underneath the skin of the legs and breast. Pat the skin back into place.

Salt and pepper the inside of the chicken and stuff some of the parsley, carrots, onion, and celery in its cavity.

Tuck the wings under the chicken and tie the legs together.

Scatter the remaining parsley, carrots, onion, and celery in the roasting pan with the lemon slices. Set the chicken on top, breast side up; sprinkle with more salt and pepper. Roast for 40 min., basting occasionally with 1 Tbs. of the reserved garlic oil.

Turn the oven up to 425°. Turn the bird over and sprinkle it with salt and pepper. Continue roasting for another 25 to 30 min., basting the chicken with its juices. When the internal temperature reaches 170°, or the thigh juices run clear, remove the bird from the pan and let it sit on a platter, covered with foil to keep it warm.

Begin making the sauce—While the chicken roasts, pour the remaining garlic oil into a medium frying pan and set it over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add the mushrooms. Turn the heat to high and sauté the mushrooms until browned, about 8 min. Remove from the heat but keep warm.

Set the roasting pan, with the vegetables and juices, on the stove over medium heat. Spoon off as much fat as you can. Add the chicken stock and lemon juice and bring to a boil. Let the sauce boil for 5 min. to concentrate its flavors. Strain the sauce, pressing out all the juices from the solids. Degrease the sauce and set aside.

Return the mushrooms to medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, add the Madeira, let it bubble briefly, and add the sauce and lemon zest. Serve with the chicken.

Bob Kinkead is the chef/owner of Kinkead's, a restaurant in Washington, DC. ◆

You can't make a great Caesar salad without a good dose of aarlic. The author uses whole leaves of romaine for his salad and tops it with anchovies, grated egg yolk and white, and Parmesan cheese. You can make the salad with any or none of these accompaniments, or toss the dressing with lettuce torn into bite-size pieces.

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n artichoke's appeal isn't immediately apparent to everyone. Its tough, sometimes prickly exterior doesn't exactly invite one to dine, yet beneath that armor lies a heart that's sweet and tender.

A VEGETABLE WITH YEAR-ROUND APPEAL

Artichokes are often thought of as a harbinger of spring, but they're actually grown year-round and have different qualities depending on when they're harvested. Spring artichokes are slightly rounded rather than pointy, with leaves that are tightly folded. In summer, artichokes tend to be cone-shaped and

have slightly splaying outer leaves. Throughout spring and summer, artichokes should be a clear, bright green with no signs of browning or scarring.

Winter artichokes are kissed by the frost. Fall- and winter-grown artichokes may be either round or conical, and their leaves may splay slightly, but above all, they will exhibit

the "kiss of frost"—brown striations and scarring where frost has broken down the outer layers or cells. Don't be put off by the brown spots; the quality of these artichokes has not suffered. Winter artichokes have a delectable, somewhat nutty taste to which many artichoke aficionados are addicted. Where I live in northern California, the frost-kissed artichokes appear in late November and are the perfect match for the first Dungeness crabs of the season.

THE BEST WAY TO EAT AN ARTICHOKE DEPENDS ON ITS AGE AND SIZE

Young, garden-fresh, baby-sized artichokes are the most tender. Virtually the entire bud can be eaten; only the outermost leaves need be discarded. Sliced very thin and seasoned with good olive oil and salt, they're delicious even raw. They're also delectable cooked and are the perfect size for adding, whole or halved, to stews and braises.

Artichokes at midseason are quite versatile and can be eaten any way except raw. Mature, end-of-season artichokes, with large, well-developed chokes, tend to have plump, meaty bottoms; they're the best choice for stuffing.

The size of an artichoke is not an indication of its age; rather, it's a matter of where the artichoke grew on the plant. The largest ones top the stem in the center of the plant; small and medium-sized ones sprout between the angle of a leaf and the stalk. Though they are small, these artichokes can be fully mature buds and may be tough, with chokes as well developed as their larger siblings.

Artichokes are thistles. The part we eat is the flower's bud. As an artichoke matures, hairlike fibers called the choke (actually the petals of the flower) develop in the center of the bud. These must be scraped away before the artichoke heart can be eaten. Late in their development, the choke is surrounded by sharp, purple-tinged leaves that must also be discarded. As an artichoke grows older, the outer leaves become more fibrous, but there's usually a meaty bit to be savored at the base of the outer leaves, and some innermost leaves remain that are tender enough to eat whole.

To select a tender artichoke, listen carefully.

When choosing an artichoke, rub it with your fingertips. Tender artichokes—those with less-developed chokes—will squeak when the leaves are rubbed together; tough ones with well-developed chokes will sound dryand hollow. Tender artichokes feel heavy and solid in the hand, almost moist; those with maturing chokes

feel lighter and less substantial.

A tip for choosing

artichokes: tender ones

will squeak when

their leaves are

rubbed together.

Store artichokes in the coldest part of the refrigerator in a plastic bag. Stored properly, they'll easily keep for a week.

KEEP ARTICHOKES GREEN

Cut into a raw artichoke and it will almost instantly turn brown. Although there are ways to slow the process, in my experience, no matter what you do or how quickly you do it, there's always a bit of discoloration. You can minimize browning by using only stainless-steel knives and scissors to cut artichokes, by immediately rubbing the cut surfaces Young artichokes and the first fava beans of the season are combined in this traditional Provençal stew. Seasoned with just garlic and fresh herbs, the flavor of the vegetables stands forth as the main attraction.

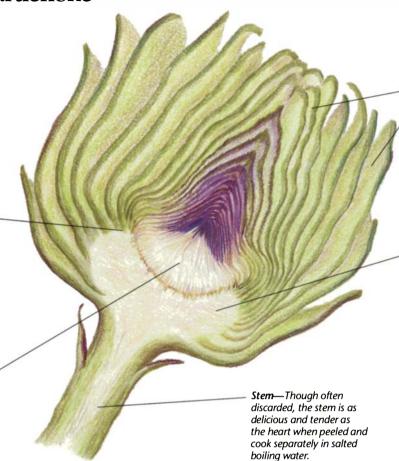


Anatomy of an artichoke

An artichoke is the sum of many parts, each with its own special characteristics. If you've never cooked one before, this diagram can help you find what you're looking for and decide how to prepare it.

Heart—Artichoke hearts are the bottoms with the tender part of their covering cone of leaves. The tender hearts can be braised, added to stews and salads, grilled, roasted, or poached.

Choke— There isn't much of a choke in very young artichokes, but for older artichokes, you'll need to remove these coarse, hairlike leaves.



Leaves—The outermost leaves are always tough, but at the base of even the toughest leaves, there is usually a tender bit of meat. Inside every artichoke are tender, ivorycolored leaves that are entirely edible.

Bottom—After the leaves and choke are removed, what's left is the bottom. Fill large ones with a savory stuffing; small ones can be cut up and simmered in a sauce.

Preparing artichokes for cooking

Before you can eat an artichoke, you need to remove the inedible parts to make the edible portions easier to get to.



Cut off the stem at the base of the artichoke. Peel back and snap off the first layers of leaves, which are often tough. Slice through the upper third of the artichoke with a sharp, stainless-steel knife. Immediately rub the cut surfaces with lemon.



To prepare artichokes for serving whole, use stainless-steel scissors to cut off the spiny tips of the remaining leaves. Rub each cut surface with lemon. Drop the artichoke into acidulated water and leave it there until you're ready to cook it.



To prepare artichoke hearts, follow the steps described in the first caption, and then slice through the artichoke about an inch above where the leaves are attached to the base. Rub the cut surface with a lemon.

with a piece of lemon, and by keeping the artichoke in water acidulated with lemon juice or vinegar until you're ready to use it. Don't use aluminum or castiron pots for cooking, as these will discolor artichokes as well. Also, don't cover raw artichokes with foil; use kitchen parchment or plastic wrap instead. Finally, whenever possible, cook artichokes in acidulated water. But as unpleasant as it may look, browning doesn't affect the flavor of the artichokes, and I've always felt that fretting too much over appearances interferes with the pleasures of eating.

ARTICHOKES LIKE MEDITERRANEAN FLAVORS

Although I love to eat my way through a simply steamed artichoke leaf by leaf, I confess to be at more risk of eating until I pop when artichokes have been prepared in one of the rustic ways of their native Mediterranean. Not surprisingly, artichokes are well matched with many of the seasonings we associate with that part of the world. They have an affinity for garlic, tarragon, thyme, and winter savory; for butter, olive oil, cream, and for Parmesan cheese. Artichokes go well with seafood—especially shrimp, crab, scallops, and salmon—and with light meats, such as chicken and pheasant, and also with lamb.

Artichoke Pesto

Use this fluffy purée as a dip for raw vegetables, spread it across grilled toast, or toss it with your favorite pasta. Yields about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups.

3 medium artichokes (7 oz. each), steamed whole (or use 6 small or 2 large artichokes)

1/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan or other dry cheese 3 Tbs. olive oil

1 tsp. minced garlic

 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt

½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Cut off the stem of each artichoke at its base. If your artichokes have little or no choke development, scoop out the bottom and all the tender leaves. Alternatively, if your artichokes are more mature, cut them in half lengthwise, remove and discard the choke, and scoop out the bottom and tender leaves. You should have about 1 cup combined artichoke bottom and tender leaves.

In a food processor or blender, purée the artichoke pieces, cheese, and 2 Tbs. of the oil to a thick paste. Add the remaining 1 Tbs. oil, the garlic, salt, and pepper and purée until just combined.

Artichoke & Sausage Cakes

These can be served on their own as a main course or as an appetizer accompanied with a roasted tomato sauce, just a dose of garlic and lemon, or tucked between slices of focaccia to make a sandwich. Yields six cakes.

1/2 lb. fresh pork sausage meat 1 egg, well beaten 3/4 cup coarse fresh breadcrumbs 1 Tbs. milk 1/4 tsp. salt ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper 1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme

3 medium artichokes (7 oz. each)

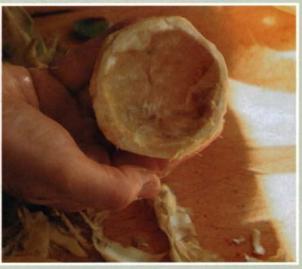
In a large mixing bowl, combine the sausage, egg, breadcrumbs, milk, salt, pepper, and thyme. Trim the



Snap off the remaining leaves until you reach the inner layer of the palest yellow leaves. If the choke is developed, scoop it out with a sharp-edged stainlesssteel spoon. Drizzle the cavity with lemon juice. Trim all the dark-green remains of the snapped leaves away from the base. Rub all cut surfaces with one of the lemon halves and keep the heart in acidulated water until ready to use.



If a recipe calls for halved or quartered artichokes, prepare as for hearts, cut as directed, and keep in acidulated water until ready to use.



To prepare artichoke bottoms, follow the steps for preparing artichoke hearts, but trim the leaves off completely and scoop out all of the choke.

Artichoke and sausage patties make a wonderful sandwich filling. Serve them between slices of focaccia with leaves of tender lettuce.



artichokes down to the hearts following the directions on pp. 38-39 and chop them fine. Stir the chopped artichokes into the sausage mixture until well combined. Shape the mixture into six cakes about 1½ inches thick. Cover with plastic wrap until ready to cook.

In a large nonstick frying pan, cook the cakes over medium heat until golden brown, 7 to 8 min. on each side. Put the cooked cakes on a rack set over paper towels to drain. Serve warm.

This simple purée of steamed artichokes and Parmesan cheese makes an unusual dip for fresh vegetables.

Artichokes & Fava Beans Braised in Olive Oil

I like to serve this simple vegetable stew alongside herbgrilled pork chops and a fluffy mound of buttery mashed potatoes—all the tastes seem made for each other. Serves four to six.

2 to 2½ lb. fresh fava beans (about 2 cups shelled beans) 16 very small artichokes (about 2 oz. each)

or 6 medium artichokes 1/3 cup extra-virain olive oil

6 cloves garlic, minced

2 Tbs. chopped fresh winter savory

2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme

1/2 tsp. salt

1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper Freshly squeezed lemon juice to taste

Remove the skins from the fava beans by splitting them with your fingernail or a small knife. Trim the artichokes down to the hearts following the directions on pp. 38-39. Cut the artichokes in half (cut larger artichokes into quarters or sixths). Keep the cut artichokes in acidulated water until you're ready to cook them.

In a sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Remove the artichokes from the water, pat dry, and cook them in the hot oil with the garlic, stirring frequently, 4 to 5 min. Add the fava beans and continue to cook until the artichokes turn a deep olive green, about 5 min. longer. Stir in the savory, thyme, salt, and pepper. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer until the artichokes are very tender, 15 to 20 min. depending on their size. Just before serving, add the lemon juice to taste.

Georgeanne Brennan grows artichokes on her ten-acre farm in Winters, California. She has written several cookbooks, including Potager: Fresh Cooking in the French Style and The Vegetarian Table: France (Chronicle Books, 1992 and 1995, respectively.) ◆





Wine Choices

Artichokes have a sweet effect on wine

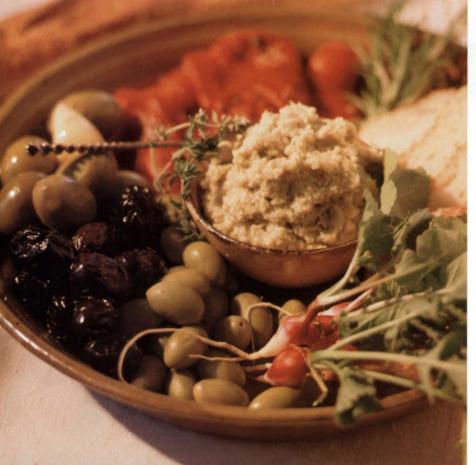
Why do some purists say that the best wine for artichokes is no wine at all? Because of cynarin. Found only in artichokes, this substance makes everything else, even water, taste sweet. Though not everyone experiences this strange effect, it's quite dramatic—and it can wreak havoc on an unsuspecting glass of fine dry wine.

Do a taste test. First sip some water, nibble on a cooked artichoke, and then try the water again. If it seems sweet, just imagine what a glass of Chardonnay would taste like.

Fortunately, there are a few tricks that can help you avoid the "artichoke assault." First, use some wine in the cooking process to build its flavors into the artichokes from the start. As Georgeanne Brennan has done with the recipes in this article, you can surround the artichoke with wine-friendly flavors: citrus, olive oil, breadcrumbs—even seafood, meat, or poultry.

You can also skip the wine altogether —and get back to it with the next course—and wash those 'chokes down with some iced tea or mineral water instead.

-Rosina Tinari Wilson is a food and wine writer and teacher based in the San Francisco area. She is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking.



Genuine Southern Biscuits

Tender, flaky, delicious—and ready in less than half an hour

BY JOHN MARTIN TAYLOR

've always loved bread. When I lived in New York City, I rode the subway 80 blocks for my favorite loaf; as a freelance photographer in Paris, I walked two miles for *mon pain*; and while working in the Caribbean, I begged baguettes from friends who owned a French restaurant. Though I'll obviously go out of my way for a good crust, what I crave at breakfast, no matter where I am, is a real southern biscuit made with soft flour and fresh lard.

SOFT FLOUR MAKES THE BEST BISCUITS

Real southern biscuits need soft southern flour. Made from the winter wheat that grows in the South, it has less protein than northern all-purpose or bread flour, meaning that it develops less gluten and keeps the biscuits tender. I use White Lily flour, but if you don't live in the South, where it's available in any grocery store, you can order it by mail (423/546-5511).

You can adapt southern biscuits for northern flour. I strongly recommend soft flour, but if you can't get your hands on it, you can mix some cake or pastry flour (which has a little less protein than soft southern flour) with an equal amount of all-purpose flour. You can also use straight all-purpose flour, which will make the biscuits slightly heavier but still

You'll want to eat biscuits every day once you try these. And because they're so quick to make, you can.



Photo below: Brian Hagiwara. All others: Jan Newberr

delicious. Because flours can vary in density, for best results measure whatever flour you use by weight rather than by volume.

QUICK RESULTS WITH BAKING POWDER

Most biscuit recipes call for baking powder as the leaven. A mix of certain acidic and alkaline com-

My Appalachian

grandmother lived well

into her nineties and ate

lard biscuits every day.

pounds, it produces carbon dioxide, like yeast does, but in much less time. Because I don't like the metallic taste of aluminum sulfate in some baking powder brands, I make my own baking powder by combining equal parts cream of tartar and baking soda. Butter-

milk, which adds a subtle tang to the biscuits, also mellows the alkaline taste of baking soda. You can also look for aluminum-free baking powders, which will say so on their packages.

Just the fingers, please! Use only your fingertips to briefly work the dough. Light handling means tender biscuits.

A quick punch shapes the biscuits. Use a biscuit cutter to keep the edges clean-cut for a good rise.



FOR TRUE SOUTHERN FLAVOR AND TEXTURE, USE LARD

To shorten biscuits, real southern cooks insist on fresh lard (rendered pork fat), which makes the flakiest pie crusts and the most delicately layered biscuits. Some misguided folks use butter or vegetable shortening, but if you ask me, they're not really making biscuits.

You may be happy to know that lard has about half the saturated fat of butter. And although vegetable shortening has less saturated fat than lard, that doesn't mean it's better for you: vegetable shortenings are partially hydrogenated, meaning they contain trans

fats, which are thought to actually raise cholesterol. My Appalachian grandmother lived well into her nineties and ate lard biscuits every day. I follow her lead and simply avoid all processed foods, commercial shortenings included.

Rendering lard yourself is easy and ensures the best quality. While you can use lard from the grocery store, you might want to try rendering your own. Ask a butcher for freshly trimmed pork fat, ground or cubed. Melt the fat over low heat on the stove or in a warm oven until it's crystal-clear and any stray pieces of flesh have turned brown and sunk to the bottom of the pan. Strain the clear fat into a clean container; allow it to firm up at room temperature. Covered, it will keep in the refrigerator for months.

A LIGHT TOUCH AND QUICK HANDLING FOR TENDER BISCUITS

Given their simple list of ingredients, much of what makes biscuits irresistible is the way the dough is





worked. Made right, the biscuits are light, tender, and flaky; handled too much, they'll be tough and leaden.

A light touch keeps the dough from developing too much gluten. When the lard melts during cooking, it leaves little spaces to be filled by the gases released by the leavens. If the dough warms up during mixing, the lard will melt too soon, so don't use your hands to incorporate the lard or you'll end up with heavy biscuits. Instead, use a pastry cutter or two knives working in opposing directions to cut the lard into the dry ingredients just until there are no large clumps left. Use only your fingertips when mixing the ingredients; this keeps the dough cool and keeps you from overworking it and creating too much gluten, which will toughen your biscuits. You're just trying to get the ingredients in this fairly dry batter to hold together, no more.

Punch—don't press—your biscuits. When rolling out the dough, keep the pressure on the rolling pin light. Use a metal biscuit cutter dipped in flour to punch out the biscuits in a quick motion. Don't twist the cutter or press the dough or you'll seal the edges and the biscuits won't rise properly. Also, don't use an overturned glass; not only will it seal the edges, but it can compact the dough and make tough biscuits. If you don't have a biscuit cutter, simply cut the biscuits into squares with a sharp knife. Square biscuits also eliminate the problem of rerolled dough scraps. As you cut, put the biscuits on an ungreased baking sheet, close together but not touching. If they're too close, their edges won't cook and the biscuits will have a cakey texture; too far apart and they'll brown too quickly and be undercooked inside.

The recipe that follows is for authentic southern biscuits. They're so quick to make, you can easily treat yourself to them this Sunday for breakfast.

Genuine Southern Biscuits

This recipe calls for soft southern flour, but you can substitute the same amount of all-purpose flour or use a mix of half all-purpose and half cake flour. Flour and lard amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups). Use either measurement. *Yields 18 two-inch biscuits*.

12 oz. (about 2²/₃ cups) soft southern flour; more for dusting 1 tsp. baking soda

1 tsp. cream of tartar

1 tsp. salt

3 oz. (about ½ cup plus 4 tsp.) chilled fresh lard, cut into 1-inch chunks

3/4 to 1 cup buttermilk

Put the oven rack in center position and heat the oven to 425°F. Sift the flour, baking soda, cream of tartar, and salt into a large bowl. With a pastry blender or two knives, cut in the lard until it is evenly mixed with the flour and there are no large clumps. Working swiftly, use a rubber spatula to fold in ¾ cup buttermilk in three parts until it's just blended into the dry ingredients; add up to ¼ cup more buttermilk if needed.

Lightly dust the work surface with flour and scoop the dough onto the counter with the spatula. Dust your fingers with flour. Using your fingertips only, lightly work the dough just until it holds together.

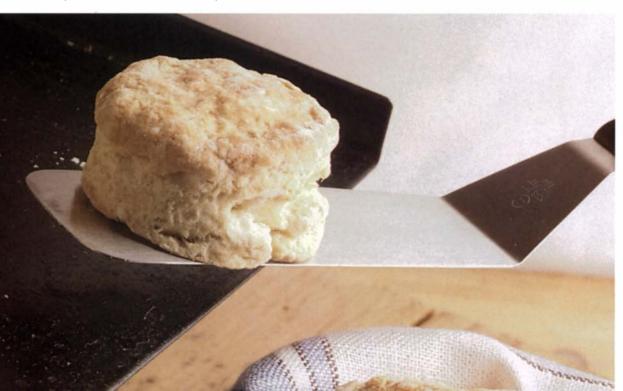
Roll the dough out about $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick and use a biscuit cutter to punch out 12 two-inch biscuits. After cutting the first dozen, quickly stack up scrap pieces, roll the dough out and cut more biscuits. This second string of biscuits won't rise as high but are still quite good.

Put the biscuits close to each other (but not touching) on an ungreased baking sheet and bake until the tops are light golden brown, 15 to 17 min. Serve immediately on their own or with butter, sour cream and preserves, or molasses.

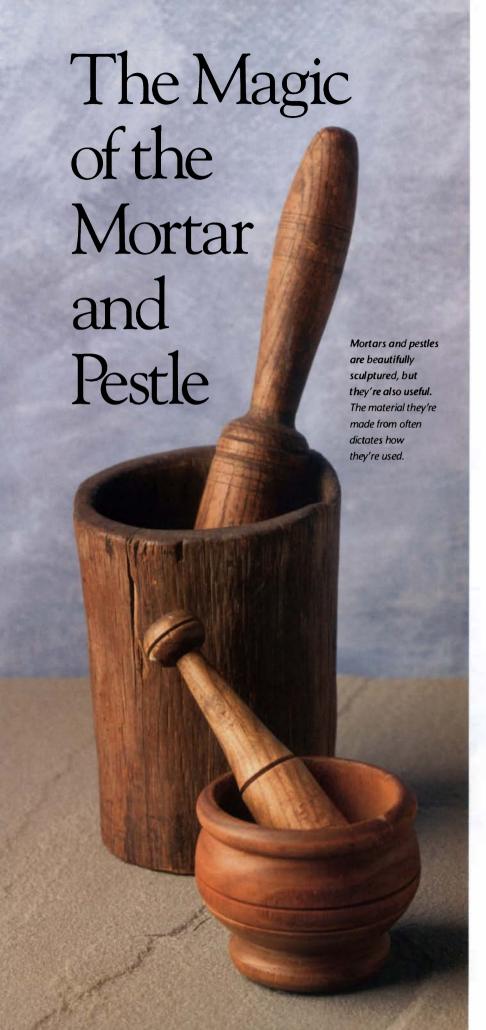
John Martin Taylor, owner of Hoppin' John's, a culinary bookstore in Charleston, North Carolina, is the author of Hoppin' John's Lowcountry Cooking and The New Southern Cook (Bantam, 1992 and 1995). ◆



A sweet treatment for biscuits. A sugar cube dipped in orange juice and pressed into the top of each biscuit comes out of the oven like a sweet syrup.



Give your biscuits space, but not too much. Don't let them touch or their edges won't cook, but keep them close so they don't overcook.



Nothing beats this hands-on tool for unlocking flavor

BY PENELOPE CASAS

get great pleasure from the powers of alchemy that my mortar and pestle suggest. But it is for more practical, earthly purposes, such as mashing herbs and spices or making sauces like pesto, that I turn time and again to one of my many mortars and pestles.

The purpose of the mortar and pestle is not just to mince and mix, but to commingle ingredients by grinding them to a powder or pounding them to a paste. This way, flavors blend and meld as they can't do when merely cut with a knife. Texture, too, changes in a mortar and pestle. Pesto, named for the pestle, can be watery when made in a food processor, but it has a traditional, rustic consistency when made in a mortar.

When I use a mortar and pestle, I feel more closely connected with the task at hand. While it takes more effort than using a food processor, the rewards are many: inhaling an enticing fragrance as aromas are released, easily gauging the texture of what I'm mashing, and even enjoying the sound of the pestle hitting the mortar. It's also easy to clean.

Though I use a food processor and couldn't live without it for the things it does best, I prefer to use a mortar and pestle when ingredient quantities are small, because the mortar and pestle does a better job of bringing out flavors. Try this experiment. Cut a clove of garlic with a sharp knife into slices. Smash another clove in a mortar and pestle or on a cutting board if you don't have one yet. The smashed clove will smell much stronger than the sliced one because more of the garlic's cells are opened when crushed, so more aromas and flavors are released.

MANY KINDS, MANY USES

Although the word *mortar* refers to its use as a container in which mortar was mixed, the tool has a long history in cooking. Used in tandem with its clubshaped pestle, it was the first means of turning grain into flour. Mortars and pestles are found in almost every culture and are made from many materials, including cast iron, brass, clay, marble, and wood.

In Mexico, lava rock and earthenware mortars (molcajetes and chimoleras) have long been used to grind spices and nuts and to crush tomatoes and

tomatillos. In Greece, *skordalia*, a wonderful creation of potato, garlic, olive oil, and often walnuts, is traditionally made in a wooden mortar. The Japanese version of the mortar, called a *suribachi*, is unglazed and ridged inside to help crush ingredients like sesame seeds and to grind shrimp into a paste.

I'm on a perpetual quest to reproduce the flavors of Spain in my kitchen, and I'd be lost without the mortar and pestle; it has long been the backbone of cooking in Spain, where mashed pastes—fragrant with

garlic, parsley, saffron, spices, and nuts—are the secret to much of the cuisine's vibrant flavors.

Keep your mortar and pestle within reach for everyday tasks. You'll find you can use it for more than making ethnic dishes. Use it to unlock the aromatic oils in dried herbs and spices. A mortar and pestle is especially effective when you need to grind a small quantity of a whole spice, which wouldn't reach the blade of a mini chopper, or to grind a few nuts. Use it to mix spice rubs, to mash anchovies to a paste for Caesar salad, or to make guacamole.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MORTAR AND PESTLE FOR YOU

I've assembled quite a collection of mortars and pestles, some for decoration and others exclusively for cooking. My brass mortars are mainly for adornment, but my Spanish ceramic mortars are put to use almost every day. I often reach for them to accomplish common tasks like mashing garlic and parsley.

The material the mortar and pestle are made of determines the jobs they're best for. A marble mortar and pestle makes short work of grinding hard ingredients, such as seeds and nuts. A mortar with a rough surface, such as lava rock or unglazed ceramic, makes mashing and grinding easier because the ingredients cling to the surface instead of slipping around.

When buying a mortar and pestle, choose one with a pestle that feels comfortable—that way, you'll want to use it often. A heavier pestle will lessen the effort needed to do the job. A good all-purpose mortar size for making seasoning mixtures is about 3½ inches across and 2½ inches deep, with a pestle that's 7 inches long and about 1½ inches wide at its base for good leverage and coverage. You may want a larger size mortar when using more ingredients, as in making pesto. Another mortar I use often is 5 inches across and 3 inches deep. If you're only buying one, choose a larger size: it will be more versatile.

No instruction manual necessary. There are just a few things to keep in mind when using a mortar





Mortars and pestles are found in many cuisines. A Japanese suribachi (foreground) has a ridged bottom for grinding spices. The oversized mortar doubles as a mixing bowl. The Mexican molcajete stands on short legs and has been used for centuries to grind spices and grains.

A variety of sizes comes in handy. The author uses a small mortar and pestle for grinding seasoning mixtures and larger ones for sauces.





Two motions for most mixtures. Pound the pestle up and down to pulverize hard ingredients such as spices and nuts (left). Push the pestle against the mortar in a circular motion to mash softer ingredients like herbs.

and pestle. Wrap one hand around the mortar to hold it in place and tightly wrap the fingers of the other hand around the pestle. If you're combining a few ingredients, begin with the hardest and pound these. Next add the softer ingredients, such as herbs and garlic. A pinch of salt draws out the moisture from the ingredients to help the mashing process. Finally, use the pestle to stir in any liquids, such as vinegar, oil, or broth.

Prices for mortars and pestles vary, but they're always a fraction of the price of a food processor.

Penelope Casas writes about Spanish food and travel. Her latest book, iDelicioso! The Regional Cooking of Spain, will be in bookstores this spring. ◆

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Shortbread stores well between layers of waxed paper. The cookies are best when freshly baked but will keep for a month in an airtight container.

Great Shortbread

How a simple dough produces an irresistible cookie

BY CAROLE BLOOM

n a recent visit to Scotland, the first thing I did was look for great shortbread—all in the name of research, of course. I'm a pastry chef, so I was obliged to eat dozens of the famous Scottish cookies. My "studies" revealed that there wasn't a shortbread I didn't like, but I left Scotland with one question unanswered: How could something so simple taste so good?

I've discovered that the secret of shortbread's buttery crumb and delicate sweetness lies in its simplicity. Since there are so few ingredients—just butter, sugar, and flour—there's nothing to hide the taste of the sweet butter, nor to overwhelm the gentle sensation of sugar and butter melting on your tongue.

But because this cookie does contain so few ingredients, everything must taste perfectly fresh. Good shortbread needs fresh ingredients, careful handling, and precise baking.

DON'T SKIMP ON INGREDIENTS

The "short" in shortbread refers to shortening—in this case, butter. Shortbread is different from many other cookies because of its high proportion of butter to flour, and this richness produces a tender, crumbly cookie.

The quality of shortbread is intrinsically linked to the quality of its butter. Always use unsalted butter in shortbread; it tastes fresher and richer than salted butter. Buy new butter before you bake; this recipe won't give good results if you use butter that's been in the refrigerator for a month.

Superfine sugar makes a smooth dough. I use superfine sugar to help create the delicate texture that's one of

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No other cookie depends on butter quite so much as shortbread. Shortbread is made from just butter, flour, and sugar, but the results taste like far more than the sum of its parts.



Add the flour in stages. Slowly combining the butter and flour ensures you won't find any flour "pockets" in your cookies.



Let a rectangle be your guide. Tracing a rectangle on the underside of your parchment gives you an easy quideline for shaping the dough.

Begins with Butter

the hallmarks of great shortbread. Superfine sugar dissolves very easily with no trace of grittiness. When blended with softened butter, it produces a silkysmooth mixture.

If you can't find superfine sugar, it's easy to make a good substitute. Pulse granulated sugar in a food processor fitted with a steel blade for 30 to 60 seconds.

You can also make an unusual short-bread variation by using light brown sugar, which adds a rich, deep flavor. There's no need to run it through the food processor—it's fine enough as it is.

All-purpose flour is the best for shortbread. Flour is the shortbread's workhorse—it holds everything together. Freshness is important here, too—flour can go stale. And be sure to use all-purpose flour. Bread flour makes tough cookies, and shortbread dough made

with cake or pastry flour loses shape in baking. If you want a lighter, more delicate shortbread, however, replace two tablespoons of every cup of all-purpose flour with cornstarch or cake flour.

Don't forget to add salt to the flour; salt keeps the shortbread from tasting flat. Measure the salt carefully; the cookie's simple flavors won't give a too-generous pinch a place to hide.

THE DOUGH TECHNIQUE NEEDS LITTLE EXPLANATION

There aren't any special techniques for making shortbread. It is important, however, to pay attention to the details of temperature and mixing the dough.

All shortbread ingredients should be at room temperature. This helps everything blend more easily and is essential for a light, fluffy dough. If the butter is too cold, it will break down and become grainy when blended; too warm, and you'll have a greasy dough. Either of these undesirable results would be reflected in your shortbread.

After you whip the sugar and butter together, add the flour—but only a little at a time. Adding the flour in stages helps it blend in more easily and reduces the possibility of developing pockets of unblended flour in your dough.

If you want to add a flavoring to your shortbread, incorporate it just after you've added the last bit of flour. You don't want to overwhelm the cookie's simplicity, but a touch of citrus zest or candied ginger added to the dough is delicious.

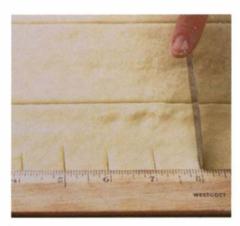
SHAPE, CHILL, AND BAKE

Shortbread is usually made in round, rectangular, or triangular shapes, but it can

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The dough doesn't need accurate rolling. Pat the dough into a rectangle with your fingers.



Score the dough while it's soft. Before you chill the dough, use a knife to gently trace the lines where you'll cut the shortbread. The author uses a ruler for accuracy.



Chill before you cut. These shortbread fingers were thoroughly chilled before the author began slicing them into cookies. Unchilled shortbread would lose its shape when baked.

also be rolled out and cut with cookie cutters, or shaped in classic wooden shortbread molds.

The large amount of butter makes this dough very soft. Score or shape the dough while it's soft, and then refrigerate it for at least two hours before baking. If you don't chill the dough, the cookies will spread and lose their shape when baked.

Shortbread needs slow and even baking. I recommend that you line your baking sheets with kitchen parchment to save on clean-up time. Shortbread shouldn't brown much, so it's baked at a

How can something so simple taste so good?

low temperature—300° to 325°F. I prefer shortbread that's sand-colored on top and very pale gold on the bottom. If you like darker shortbread, bake it a few minutes longer.

Shortbread can be stored for up to a month between layers of waxed paper in an airtight container at room temperature. Don't try to refrigerate or freeze it, since it would absorb moisture and become soft.

Shortbread is best, however, when eaten freshly baked. You can count on its toasty, buttery aroma attracting a few volunteers to do just that.

Classic Scottish Shortbread

This is the traditional rich, crumbly short-bread of Scotland. It lends itself beautifully to many variations, as I've shown in the recipes that follow. Butter and flour amounts are listed by weight (pounds or ounces) and volume (cups). Use either measurement. Yields about sixty 1x2½-inch cookies.

1 lb. (2 cups) unsalted butter, softened 1 cup superfine sugar ½ tsp. salt 18 oz. (4 cups) all-purpose flour

Use an electric mixer (with the paddle attachment if you have one) to beat the butter until it's light and fluffy, about 1 min. Slowly add the sugar and continue beating until thoroughly blended.

Blend the salt and flour. Add the flour, about 1 cup at a time, to the butter. Stop the mixer and scrape down the sides of the bowl after each addition. If you're flavoring the shortbread, add the ingredients now. (See recipes at right). Continue to mix another 2 to 3 min., until the dough is smooth and soft.

SHAPE THE SHORTBREAD

For fingers—On a large sheet of kitchen parchment, draw a 10x15-inch rectangle using a pencil and ruler. Lay the paper on a jelly roll pan or baking sheet; you'll use this paper as a template to shape your shortbread. Working quickly, pat or roll the dough into an even layer. Use a ruler to score the dough into $1x2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces. With a fork, pierce each piece in three places on a diagonal.

For a traditional wooden shortbread mold—Dust the mold lightly with flour. Put a ball of the dough in the center of the mold. Use a rolling pin to roll the dough out to the edges of the mold. Turn the mold over and

tap it lightly to release the shortbread. Repeat with the remaining dough. Arrange the molded shortbreads on a lined baking sheet, leaving an inch between them.

For a large round—Shape half the dough into a ball. Set the ball in the center of a lined baking sheet. With a rolling pin, roll the dough into an 8-inch circle about ½ inch thick. (Use an 8-inch cake or pie pan as a guide. Cut off any excess dough.) Use a fork to press around the edge to form a decorative border. Score the shortbread into 8 wedges, starting from the center and working out to the edge.

CHILL BEFORE BAKING

Cover the cookies tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to 4 days. The dough can also be frozen: just defrost it in the refrigerator for 24 hours before baking.

BAKE THE SHORTBREAD

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat to 325°F.

For shortbread fingers, line two baking sheets with parchment. Cut the chilled dough through the scored lines. Arrange the fingers on the baking sheets, with an inch of space between each. (Don't cut molded shortbread or a large shortbread round.)

Put the baking sheets in the oven and reduce the heat to 300°. Bake for 20 min. Turn the pans halfway around, switch their positions on the racks, and bake another 14 to 16 min.

Remove the baking pans from the oven. Cool the pans on racks for 5 min., and then transfer the cookies to the racks. The shortbread will keep for up to a month between layers of waxed paper in an airtight container at room temperature.

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Space shortbread evenly on the baking sheet. The hot air of the oven needs to circulate around the cookies. Don't let them get too dark; classic shortbread isn't browned, but very pale gold.

FLAVOR VARIATIONS

While some prefer
the pure buttery flavor
of basic shortbread, the
cookie also takes well to a
number of spices and flavorings.
The author's variations include
ginger, spice, hazelnut, and
candied orange peel, but
you can also use chopped
almonds or cardamom.
On the Shetland Islands, off
the coast of Scotland, they
even use ground cumin to
flavor their shortbread.



Hazelnut Shortbread

Other toasted and chopped nuts can be substituted for hazelnuts.

4½ oz. (1 cup) chopped, toasted, blanched hazelnuts

After all the flour has been added to the dough, mix in the nuts. Continue as directed.

Spicy Shortbread

2 tsp. ground cinnamon 1 tsp. ground ginger ½ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

Blend the spices. After all the flour has been added to the shortbread dough, mix in the spice blend. Continue as directed.

Ginger Shortbread

1 cup finely chopped crystallized ginger 2 tsp. ground ginger

After all the flour has been added to the shortbread dough, blend in both types of ginger. Continue as directed.

Orange Shortbread

1 cup finely chopped candied orange peel 2 tsp. orange extract

After all the flour has been added to the shortbread dough, mix in the orange peel and extract. Continue as directed.

Carole Bloom is a European-trained pastry chef and confectioner who has been teaching both amateurs and professionals for 16 years. Her latest books are The International Dictionary of Desserts, Pastries & Confections (Hearst Books, 1995) and The Candy Cookbook (Chronicle Books, 1995).



Shortbread cookies should cool on a rack. This ensures they won't brown too much from the pan's heat.

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Photoe: Dehorah Ic

A Spring Buffet: Fresh, Light Food for a Big Crowd

A caterer shows how to juggle lots of dishes and lots of guests by choosing a balanced menu and keeping a cool head

BY PAULA LEDUC

hen I started catering fifteen years ago, I worked out of my very small house with two small children under my feet and, fortunately, a very supportive husband. I know how hard it can be to have a real life and to pull together a party for a crowd. Serving a menu of hors d'oeuvres, which are so labor-intensive, only adds to the stress. But big buffet parties are fun—and a great way to pay back all those invitations you accepted over the holidays. By thinking through every detail to eliminate trouble

Piggyback peppered shrimp look great on a glass platter that's set on a base of bright green limes. The simple presentation makes the food stand out.



spots, you can pull off a smashing event for twenty people with delicious and inventive food, beautifully presented, without having a nervous breakdown.

A WELL-CRAFTED MENU GIVES LIFE TO A PARTY

Think first about the occasion and the mood of the party. In this article, I'm offering a menu for a casual party with light food that signals a real change from the last few months of heavy food, heavy weather, and heavy overcoats.

For an event like this, I love to "layer" the food, so different items are presented as the party unfolds. Sur-



Author Paula LeDuc knows that big parties can be easy. "I recommend only a few labor-intensive items on a menu; keep the rest simple so you don't burn yourself out before the party starts." Here, she does some advance prep for polenta cups.

prises are a good thing to keep your guests' interests piqued. Pacing the flow of food also gives the party some structure. Unlike a sit-downdinner party, where the structure of the evening is obvious since one dish follows the next, a buffet is freeform. But freeform doesn't mean haphazard—you can't just put a bunch of dishes together on the same table; you need to craft the menu so the mix and pacing are just right.

Here are the criteria I used to plan this menu:

• the food should be light and spring-like, since spring will be desperately on everyone's mind, even if there's still a little snow on the ground;

- ◆ the dishes should be casual and fun—good buffets are very unstuffy affairs;
- the hors d'oeuvres should be intriguing and beautiful—something to talk about, which makes for easier mingling and ice-breaking among the guests; and
- everything must be easy to eat with just fingers and a napkin.

A REALISTIC MENU INCLUDES SOME EASY DISHES, TOO

The next and perhaps most important part of planning this party is to get realistic about what you can

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Cheese and chile polenta cups can be made ahead and just heated when it's time to serve. Here, three flavored polentas are layered to make pretty stripes, but you can make the hors d'oeuvre with just a single flavor to save time.



and can't do. It's easy to think of a selection of fabulous hors d'oeuvres that would taste delicious and look terrific, but it isn't so easy to find the time and energy to prepare them all, nor to organize the logistics of presenting and serving them. If you want to do this party by yourself or with the help of one other person, you have to find a way to streamline your efforts. Aside from being organized and making good lists, you need to put the most effort into a few starring "hand-made" items that you can show off, and then fill out the rest of the menu with equally delicious but less labor-intensive dishes.

Take the pressure off yourself by serving one or two "filler" items. My method for keeping labor

under control is to have at least one "filler" dish that's easy to prepare, doesn't require a lot of assembly, can be done ahead of time, and will be popular and filling. My top three picks for this slot are:

- a roasted tenderloin of beef, with a tasty sauce or two and freshly baked rolls so people can make their own sandwiches;
- a sliced smoked salmon, again with some toasts or rolls and a good mustard-dill sauce; and
- a big platter of grilled or roasted vegetables, glistening with good olive oil and sprinkled with fresh herbs.

In the menu I'm showing here, I've chosen to include the vegetables, because beef and salmon show up in other hors d'oeuvres. I can fix the vegetables the morning of the party, arrange them on the serving platter, and keep them covered at room temperature until it's time to serve them.

Try a couple of dishes that can be completed ahead. Now that I have my "workhorse" item planned, I'll move to my second tier: hors d'oeuvres that are individually prepared but that still can be made ahead of time. In this menu, I'm offering two kinds of rolled hors d'oeuvres—a beef with scallion and a salmon with cucumber. The assembly for both of these consists of just cutting scallion or cucumber into julienne, spreading a little sauce on slices of beef

or salmon, and rolling up tiny bundles. They look very pretty, they're delicious, and you can make them several hours ahead and just cover the tray tightly with plastic wrap.

Another candidate for this kind of individual but not-too-fussy item is a spicy grilled shrimp. I marinate the shrimp ahead of time and grill or broil them the morning of the party. The shrimp is ready to go, even without a sauce.

Polenta cups with goat cheese, chiles, and cilantroare very much do-ahead items that can be totally assembled the day ahead and just warmed in the oven and topped with fresh herbs when it's time to serve. Another advantage of this hors d'oeuvre is that it's economical; you get a lot of food for a little money, so you can splash out more on the seafood.

Give yourself time for a show-stopping dish. Now I'm left with some time to devote to a couple of specialty hors d'oeuvres, which have more steps in their preparation. My mini tostadas are fabulous. The tiny flour tortilla shells can be shaped and baked ahead and simply assembled when it's time to serve. This type of hors d'oeuvre doesn't sit around well, so I would designate this one, and perhaps the warm polenta cups, as good candidates for passing on trays. Bringing a tray of hot, fragrant food from the

oven always causes the right kind of stir among the guests.

Set up an "action station" for a lively break. The last category of hors d'oeuvre is what I call my "action station" food, something tasty that's cooked during the party in front of the guests. I usually use a portable burner (available in hardware stores and many cookware stores for around \$65), or if the party's outside, I choose the grill. For this menu, I'm proposing tiny

quesadillas with crab and avocado, but other good action food could be little cheese blintzes, tiny crab cakes, or mini grilled brochettes.

You might think that you'll be too frazzled to cook in front of your guests, but in fact having an action station makes your cooking chores easier because you don't have to have the item cooked and complete by the time the guests arrive. Just have everything prepared on trays or plates, and then when you feel like the party could use an injection of fun, light up your burner and start cooking.

Guests love to gather round and eat the food right as it comes from the pan, and you can even get people to take over the cooking for you. It's a great way to get a shy guest more involved with the party. Just work the station for half an hour or so until everyone has had a chance to sample, and then give it a rest. You can come back an hour later,

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"Layer" the food

so different items

are presented as

the party unfolds.



The plan of action

You should select the recipes you want to make according to how much time you actually have. If you want to do the whole party as I've presented it, here's a timetable that will help you stay on course.

A WEEK AHEAD

- ◆ Shop for wine and other nonperishables
- ◆ Organize linens and serving pieces

TWO DAYS AHEAD

- ◆ Shop for perishables
- ♦ Marinate the beef
- Make the polenta cups; prepare the chiles and cheese
- ◆ Make the sauce for the tostadas

ONE DAY AHEAD

- ♦ Marinate the shrimp and chicken
- ◆ Prep the tortillas for the quesadillas and tostadas
- ♦ Cook the beef
- ◆ Make the avocado-crab filling for quesadillas
- ◆ Assemble the polenta cups
- ◆ Set the table

THE MORNING OF THE PARTY

- ◆ Cook the shrimp
- ◆ Cook and chop the chicken
- ◆ Grill the vegetables
- ◆ Make the salmon rolls
- ◆ Finish the beef rolls
- ◆ Make the chile and mango salsas

JUST BEFORE THE PARTY BEGINS

- ◆ Assemble the quesadillas
- ◆ Assemble the tostadas
- ◆ Arrange all platters

DURING THE PARTY

- ♦ Heat the polenta cups
- ◆ Cook the quesadillas to order

Casual food wants a casual arrangement. Piles of fresh fruit, pitchers of herbs, and a few fresh flowers are all you need to make your serving table look great.

when people are starting to crave a second round of hot quesadillas.

THE SIMPLEST DECORATIONS CAN BE THE BEST

Now that you know what you're going to serve, start planning how you'll present it. As a caterer, I devote a lot of energy to making delicious food that also looks stunning, but you don't need to be a pro to do the same at your own affairs. There are lots of fresh, simple, and quick ways to show off your food and to make your table eye-catching.

WEAVE A MAT
OF LEEK GREENS

To make a beautiful liner for a platter, blanch some leek greens and weave them into a mat. Lay a sheet of plastic wrap on the work surface so you can transfer the finished mat to the platter. Start by arranging some vertical strips. Fold back every other one halfway, lay a horizontal strip across, and fold the verticals back into place. Now fold back the strips that weren't folded, add another horizontal, and continue until half the mat is woven. Turn the mat around and repeat the process for the other half. Trim with scissors to fit your platter.

Smoked salmon and cucumber rolls are a snap to make, so they're perfect for feeding a crowd. The salmon's coral color stands out against a mat woven from blanched leek tops.



Look to the food itself for inspiration. My preference is for edible or at least food-related decorations for platters and for the tabletop. On the actual serving plates, I love to lay scallions side by side as a textured surface for the beef rolls, or to pile fresh herbs in the center of a platter as a green and fragrant liner. If I want to be a little elaborate, I make a gorgeous emerald-green mat by blanching leek tops and then weaving them together; you can see the method in the photo at left.

Whatever kind of decoration you choose, be sure you've carefully rinsed anything that comes in contact with the food, and don't let any inedible items touch the food at all.

For larger table decorations, try a big bowl of fresh lemons or chile peppers, or fill flowerpots with bunches of herbs. One trick that always adds life to a buffet table is to vary the heights of the platters. We use metal risers to lift trays to different levels, but you can get the same effect by stacking plates together, putting platters on top of upturned bowls or terra-cotta pots, or even arranging a plate or tray on a handful of limes, oranges, or apples. This looks really great if the tray is clear glass, as you can see in the photo of the shrimp on p. 50.



Peppered Shrimp

These shrimp don't need a sauce to dress them up—they're delicious on their own. Yields 40 pieces.

1 cup vegetable oil; more for cooking
2 Tbs. toasted sesame oil
3-inch piece fresh ginger, sliced
1 bunch scallions, chopped coarse
1 Tbs. cracked black pepper
1 Tbs. soy sauce
½ tsp. cayenne
Pared zest of 2 oranges
40 large or jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined
Salt

In a large skillet, heat the vegetable and sesame oils until almost smoking. Add the ginger and scallions and fry for about 1 min. Remove from the heat and add the pepper, soy sauce, cayenne, and orange zest. Cool completely, and then add the raw shrimp. Marinate overnight in the refrigerator.

To cook, heat a heavy skillet until very hot, add a little oil, and sear the marinated shrimp until just opaque through the center, seasoning them with salt and more pepper to taste. Serve at room temperature.

Smoked Salmon Cucumber Rolls

Be sure to buy sliced smoked salmon unless you're expert at cutting paper-thin slices. *Yields about 40 rolls.*

12 oz. sliced smoked salmon ½ cup honey mustard
1 cucumber (preferably English), peeled, seeded (if necessary), and cut into 2-inch julienne strips

Trim the smoked salmon pieces to form about 40 strips approximately 2x4 inches each. Spread a thin layer of honey mustard on each strip, lay a small bundle of cucumber julienne at one end, and roll up securely. Arrange on a tray, seam side down, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Hoisin Beef & Scallion Rolls

½ cup soy sauce

To make slicing the beef easier, freeze the cooked and cooled steak for about half an hour first. *Yields about 40 rolls*.

½ cup oil; more for cooking
 3 cloves garlic, crushed
 ½ cup chopped fresh ginger
 Freshly ground black pepper to taste
 1 lb. London broil or flank steak, trimmed of fat
 ½ cup hoisin sauce
 1 bunch scallions, white and pale green only, cut into 2-inch julienne strips

In a shallow dish, mix together the soy sauce, oil, garlic, ginger, and some pepper. Add the beef and marinate overnight in the refrigerator, turning once.

Heat the broiler. Pat the marinated meat dry and broil the steak, about 4 inches from the heat, until rare, 5 to 6 min. per side. Cool completely and then slice very thin on the bias, across the grain of the meat. Trim the slices to form approximately 2x4-inch strips.

Brush a thin layer of hoisin sauce on each strip of beef. Lay a small bundle of scallion julienne at one end and roll up securely. Arrange on trays, seam side down,



cover tightly with plastic wrap (make sure the plastic is in close contact with the beef), and refrigerate until time to serve.

Tri-Color Polenta Cups

8 cups water

1 Tbs. salt

3 cups polenta

To save time, just make one of the polenta flavors. *Yields* eighty 1-inch hors d'oeuvres.

1 tsp. pepper
2 oz. grated Parmesan (about ½ cup)
6 Tbs. butter
2 bunches basil, blanched, squeezed dry, and chopped fine
1 smallred pepper, roasted, peeled, and puréed (about ¼ cup)
1 cup chopped roasted green chiles
1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese

7 oz. goat cheese, crumbled

Fresh cilantro leaves for decoration

In a large saucepan, bring the water to a boil, stir in the polenta, and cook until very thick and smooth, stirring constantly, about 40 min. Season with salt and pepper. Divide the warm polenta into three bowls. In one, stir in the Parmesan and 2 Tbs. butter; in the second, the basil and 2 Tbs. butter; in the red pepper and the last 2 Tbs. butter.

Line a jelly roll pan (11x17 inches) with plastic wrap. Spread one flavored polenta in an even layer, smoothing with damp fingers if necessary. Let set a few minutes; repeat with the other two layers. Cover the top with plastic and let the whole thing set up in the refrigerator at least 3 hours and up to 2 days.

With a 1-inch cookie cutter, stamp out about 80 rounds. Scoop out the center with a mini melon baller or spoon and fill each cup with a pinch of the chiles, Monterey Jack, and goat cheese. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve. To serve, heat in a 300° oven until warm and cheese is melted, about 10 min. Top with a cilantro leaf. Serve immediately.

(More recipes on the following page.)

Just spread on the sauce, add some scallions, and roll.
You'll have a platter full of these hoisin beef rolls in no time. Try arranging them on a bed of whole rinsed, trimmed scallions.

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Chicken Tostada Pequena

Instead of the tomatillo salsa suggested here, you can use your own favorite recipe or good-quality prepared salsa. *Yields 40 tostadas*.

Vegetable oil
Juice of 2 limes; more if necessary
½ cup lightly packed chopped fresh cilantro leaves
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
One 6-oz. boneless, skinless chicken breast
Six 8-inch flour tortillas
2 Tbs. crème fraîche or sour cream
½ tsp. toasted ground cumin
½ cup finely chopped tomatillo
½ cup finely shredded lettuce
¼ cup finely diced red pepper

Prepare the chicken. Mix together ¼ cup vegetable oil, 3 Tbs. of the lime juice, ¼ cup of the cilantro, salt, and pepper. Add the chicken and marinate, refrigerated, at least 2 hours and up to 24. Grill or broil until done, about 5 min. each side. Cool, chop fine, and set aside.

Meanwhile, make the tortilla cups. With a 2½-inch cookie cutter, cut 40 circles from the tortillas (you'll get about 7 per tortilla). Heat the oven to 350°F. Brush each tortilla with a little oil, press into mini muffin tins, and salt lightly. Bake until golden brown, about 5 min. Cool and store in an airtight container.

Make the cumin sauce by mixing the *crème fraîche*, cumin, 1 Tbs. of the lime juice, salt, and pepper.

Make the salsa by mixing the tomatillo with 2 Tbs. chopped cilantro, 2 Tbs. lime juice, salt, and pepper.

To assemble, toss the chicken with about 2 Tbs. chopped cilantro, 2 Tbs. lime juice, salt, and pepper. Fill each cup with a little chicken, a pinch of shredded lettuce, a spoonful of salsa, a drizzle of cumin sauce, and a sprinkle of diced red pepper. Serve immediately.

Crabmeat-Avocado Quesadillas

This recipe makes individual two-bite hors d'oeuvres, but you can make a full-sized quesadilla with two 8-inch tortillas and simply cut it into wedges after frying—not as pretty, but lots quicker. Yields sixty 2-inch quesadillas.

FOR THE MANGO SALSA:

1 ripe mango, peeled, pit removed, diced into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch cubes $\frac{1}{2}$ red bell pepper, seeded and chopped fine 1 large ripe tomato, peeled, seeded, and diced

Cooking quesadillas to order brings some action to the party, and saves you from spending more time in the kitchen away from your guests. Set up a portable burner and let the guests take turns cooking.





Wine Choices

Set up a light, easy wine bar

When the tone of your party is as carefree as Paula LeDuc's hors d'oeuvre buffet, your handling of the drinks should be carefree, too. You can go ultra-casual and mix up pitchers of Sangria or another fruit-and-wine combo: the sweetness will play nicely off the heat of some of the spicy dishes in this menu. Or make the mood elegant with sparkling wine. Domaine Chandon and Mumm Napa both make a pretty, pinktinged Blanc de Noirs at a reasonable price.

You can also set an easygoing middle course by offering several choices—fruity whites, easy-drinking reds, and festive bubblies. For a white, try something unexpected but pleasingly quaffable, like a Viognier—Georges Duboeuf makes an affordable one. As for reds, a good Beaujolais will make most people happy; again, look to Duboeuf for a wide selection, reasonably priced.

However you play it, plan on at least half a bottle of wine (12 ounces, or 2 to 3 glasses) per person, with extra stock on hand for diehard party animals. For nonalcoholic alternatives, try some not-too-sweet lemonade, iced herbal tea, or ice water with citrus slices and mint sprigs.

—Rosina Tinari Wilson, a contributing editor for Fine Cooking, is a food and wine writer and teacher.

2 Tbs. snipped fresh chives

2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro

2 Tbs. lime juice

1 jalapeño, seeded and chopped fine Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE QUESADILLAS:

Twelve 8-inch flour tortillas

1½ cups cooked crabmeat, picked over to remove any bits of shell

1½ cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese

2 ripe avocados, mashed

1/3 cup finely chopped scallion

1/3 cup lightly packed finely chopped cilantro leaves

2 Tbs. lime juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste Clarified butter or oil for frying

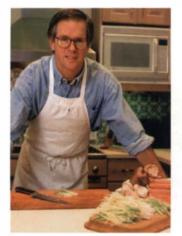
Make the salsa. Mix all the salsa ingredients together and let stand at least an hour so the flavors can develop. Chill until ready to serve.

Make the quesadillas. With a 2-inch cookie cutter, cut out 120 circles from the tortillas (you'll get about 10 per tortilla). Gently mix together the crab, cheese, avocados, scallion, cilantro, lime juice, salt, and pepper. Spread the mixture onto 60 of the tortillas (about 1 Tbs. each) and top with the other tortillas. To cook, heat a little clarified butter or oil in a frying pan and cook until lightly browned and the cheese is melting, about 2 min. per side. Serve hot with a bit of salsa on top.

Paula LeDuc owns Paula LeDuc Fine Catering, based in Emeryville, California. Her company caters events ranging from intimate dinners to the opening night at the San Francisco Opera. ◆

Boning, Stuffing, and Braising Trout

Make a classic mushroom stuffing and turn a delicious braising liquid into a light, buttery herb sauce



Patience makes a pretty garnish.
Author Jim Peterson cuts vegetables into a julienne to add flavor to the court bouillon as well as color and texture to the finished dish (right).
Serve the trout whole—head, tail, and all—for a dramatic main dish.

BY JAMES PETERSON



he first time I ate a fish cooked whole, I was about seven years old and on a camping trip with my parents. I still remember the taste of those fresh-caught trout fried up in bacon over the campfire. Since then, I've never forgotten the secret of cooking whole fish.

Comparing a fish fillet to a whole cooked fish is like comparing a boneless chicken breast to a roast chicken; compared to the former, the latter is bursting with savory juices and deep flavor. Some

fish are too large to cook whole, but many smaller fish (those about 4 pounds or less) can be cooked whole with marvelous results.

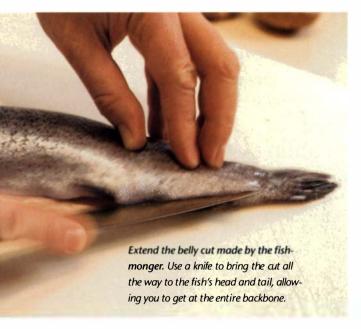
The stuffed trout I offer here is not only delicious, but its preparation also provides a lesson in classic French cooking techniques: boning a whole fish, braising, making a court bouillon, making a duxelles (a mixture of mushrooms and shallots), and mounting a sauce with butter. The finished dish is trout surrounded

by brightly colored vegetables and bathed in a light butter sauce that fills the air with the aroma of basil and parsley.

THE FISH'S BONES HAVE GOT TO GO

Most of us resist cooking a whole fish because we've either never cooked one or we fear encountering bones. There are a few ways around the problem of bones. You can carve the whole cooked fish at the table and deftly cut away the bones for your guests—a process that takes a bit

Boning the trout





of practice, not to mention showmanship—or you can bone the fish before cooking, as we're doing here.

There are two ways to bone whole round fish (flatfish like sole or flounder are another matter altogether). If you have an ungutted fish, as we did at that camp so many years ago, you may want to bone the fish through the back, being careful not to cut through the fish's belly from the inside, and to carefully pull out the innards from behind. In this way, you can leave the belly intact and the whole fish becomes a convenient pouch. But because most fish is sold already gutted, it's often impossible to bone through the back. Instead, you can bone through the belly as shown in the photos above. Whichever way you choose, remember to pull out the pin bones that run down the center of each fillet on both sides.

A PERFECT PLACE FOR STUFFING

Once you've boned a whole fish—and it's a lot easier than it sounds—you'll have a natural pocket for a simple stuffing, perhaps a sprinkling of herbs or the chopped, cooked mushrooms we're using here.

The mushroom mixture is a classic preparation called a duxelles, used for stuffing all sorts of birds and beasts as well as fish. You can make the duxelles (pronounced dook-SELL) with ordinary mushrooms or, for more flavor, with a mix of wild mushrooms.

There are many other stuffing possibilities, but for the delicately flavored trout, I avoid those that are overly rich or too strong in flavor. You want to consider the flavor of the fish when you prepare a stuffing. A baked mackerel can stand up to a stronger flavored stuffing, for example, because it's a strongtasting fish.

Don't overstuff your fish. A couple of tablespoons of stuffing is usually plenty for a trout. Too much stuffing will burst out of the fish during cooking. You can also prevent bursting by not spreading the stuffing to the edges of the fish, leaving a little room for it to spread as it cooks.

Once you've stuffed the fish, you can cook it using the same methods you'd use for fish steaks or fillets: whole fish are

delicious grilled, roasted, poached, and, as shown here, braised.

BRAISING IS GENTLE AND MAKES A GOOD SAUCE BASE

Braising is similar to poaching except that you use less liquid to cook the fish—usually just enough to come halfway up their sides. If I were poaching the fish, I'd secure the belly flaps together with toothpicks to keep the stuffing in, but because we are braising the fish in just a little liquid, you likely won't need to.

Braising also has the advantage of concentrating the fish's natural juices in a relatively small amount of cooking liquid. This liquid is transformed into a light sauce by adding freshly chopped herbs, diced tomatoes, or flavored butter.

Making the herb butter

Mix chopped herbs with softened butter to add great flavor to the sauce. Here parsley and basil leaves (½ cup of each) are minced and mixed into 8 tablespoons of butter with a wooden spoon until the herbs are thoroughly incorporated. You can also do this in a food processor, in which case there's no need to chop the herbs first. Cover the flavored butter with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until ready to use.





A flavorful broth to braise the fish.

You can use a number of different liquids to braise your fish, but white wine, fish stock, tomato juice, and water are the most popular. Here we're using a type of broth called a court bouillon, made with vegetables, white wine, and water. In most traditional recipes for court bouillon, the vegetables are chopped and then strained out and discarded, but here we make the vegetable broth with prettily julienned vegetables that we save and serve in a bright tangle over and around the finished trout.

The right pan makes braising a breeze. To braise your whole fish, track down a sauté pan or a roasting pan just large enough to hold the fish in a single layer. (If your fish are too big, use more



Use scissors to snip the backbone where it joins the head and the tail. Gently pull the ribs and backbone from the fish.



Pull the pin bones out of the fillets with tweezers or pliers. Use your fingers to feel for the bones, which are easy to find. The bones run in a line about two-thirds of the way down the fish.



Cut out the remaining backbone with scissors. What's left can be easily trimmed after the fish has been cooked.

Stuffing the trout

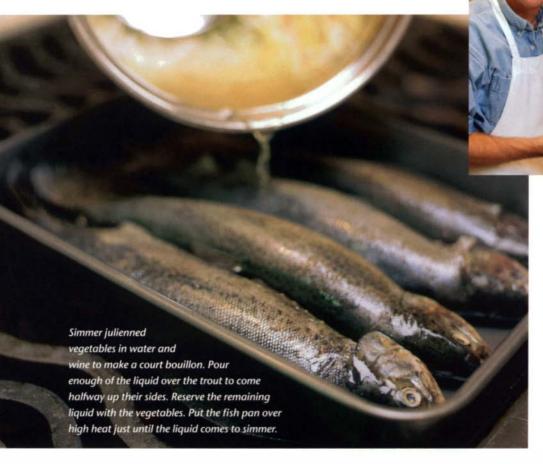
Cook chopped mushrooms with a chopped shallot in butter until dry. Add heavy cream, bring to a boil until it thickens, and season with salt and pepper.



Spread the stuffing evenly after seasoning the fish cavity with salt and pepper. Spread a few tablespoons along the inside middle of the trout, leaving room around the edges for the stuffing to expand during cooking.



Braising the trout



Cover the pan loosely with foil and bake in a 400°F oven for 15 to 20 minutes. Check for doneness by making a small slit near the dorsal fin; the flesh should look opaque.

than one pan.) Don't use too large a pan for braising or you'll need too much liquid to braise the fish and it will then take you too long to reduce the braising liquid to make a sauce.

The fish begin cooking on the stove. When simmering the trout in the court bouillon, move the pan around on the burner so it heats evenly. After about 5 minutes on the stove, the fish are finished in the oven. Total cooking time is usually about 10 minutes per inch of thickness at the thickest part. When cooked, the flesh should look opaque.

Once the fish are cooked, you simply peel off their skin, remove any remaining bone in the fish's back, and keep the fish warm while you make the sauce.

Convert the liquid left in the pan into a flavorful sauce. Often the braising liquid must be boiled to reduce it and concentrate its flavor and body. On the other hand, if there's little liquid left, add water to it until you have about ¾ cup. Once you have the right amount of liquid, you can make a light sauce by stirring in a tablespoon of chopped fresh

herbs, such as parsley, tarragon, chervil, or chives, and spooning the sauce over the trout.

You can make the sauce creamy by whisking in a little unsalted butter. You can take that a step further by using flavored butters in various combinations of flavors. In the dish here, we're adding

butter that's been mixed with fresh herbs, which I've found has a better, fuller flavor than simply adding the herbs and unflavored butter separately.

Sometimes I add more complex flavors to this dish with the addition of a morel butter and a lobster butter. A teaspoon or so of vinegar, such as whitewine or tarragon vinegar, added to the braising liquid, wakes up the sauce, giving it a little tweak of acidity.

I like to keep the sauce on the thin side, almost like a buttery broth, so that it has the satisfying feel of a butter sauce but doesn't overwhelm the fish. Because the final sauce is thin, use a deep soup plate to present the fish so the sauce won't run off the plate.

Preparing the finished dish

Transfer the cooked trout to a cutting board and peel off the skin. Pull the skin off before the fish cools and the skin begins to stick. Use a flexible knife to make a small cut near the fish's head and then pull the skin back from both sides.





Transfer the braising liquid to a saucepan and boil the liquid over high heat until there's about ¾ cup remaining (or add water to make ¾ cup). Whisk in the herb-flavored butter and the vinegar. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and remove from the heat.

You can serve the trout whole, or you can cut off the heads and tails and cut the bodies into two lozenge-shaped sections. Surround the fish with the sauce and top the plate with the julienned vegetables reserved from the court bouillon.

Boned Whole Trout with Mushroom Stuffing & Herb-Butter Sauce

Serves four as a main course; eight as an appetizer.

Four 12-oz. whole trout, boned Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste Mushroom Stuffing (see recipe at right)

Open the boned fish skin side down. Salt and pepper the inside of the fish. Spread a quarter of the mushroom stuffing onto each

Gently remove any remaining pieces of backbone, which should easily pull away from the flesh. Cover the fish loosely with foil to keep it warm.



fish, leaving about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch around the edges. Fold the fish back in half and put them in a roasting pan in which the fish fit snugly.

FOR THE MUSHROOM STUFFING:

1 Tbs. butter
1 medium shallot, chopped fine
1/2 lb. button mushrooms (or a mix of wild mushrooms), chopped
2 Tbs. heavy cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add the shallot and cook for about 5 min. Add the mushrooms. Turn the heat to high and cook, stirring until the liquid released by the mushrooms completely evaporates, about 10 min. Stir in the cream and boil the mixture until it thickens, about 1 min. Season with salt and pepper and let cool before stuffing the fish.

FOR THE COURT BOUILLON:

1 large or 2 medium carrots, julienned Whites of 2 medium leeks, julienned 1 medium turnip, julienned 1 rib celery, julienned 1 cup water 1/4 tsp. salt 1/2 cup dry white wine

Combine the vegetables with the water and salt in a medium pot. Don't worry if the water doesn't cover the vegetables; those not submerged will steam. Bring to a simmer over high heat, cover the pot, and turn the heat to low. Simmer for 10 min. Pour in the wine and simmer for another 10 min. Pour

most of the liquid into the pan over the fish for braising and reserve the vegetables and a bit of liquid in the pan to reheat later.

FOR THE HERB-BUTTER SAUCE:

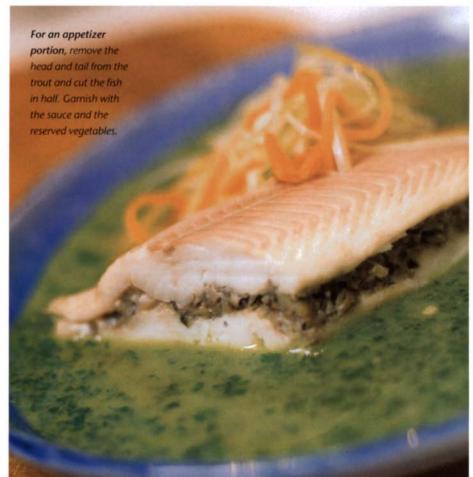
1/2 cup tightly packed parsley leaves, minced 1/2 cup tightly packed basil leaves, minced 8 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened Court bouillon from the fish pan 1 tsp. white-wine or tarragon vinegar; more to taste

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Mix the herbs and butter together until the herbs are completely incorporated. Chill the butter before using in the sauce.

Once the fish are cooked, remove them from their pan. Pour the remaining court bouillon into a medium saucepan. Reduce it over high heat or add water as necessary to make about ¾ cup of liquid. With the heat on medium, whisk in the herb-flavored butter until all lumps disappear. Add the vinegar, salt, and pepper.

James Peterson teaches French cooking around the country and is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking. He's the author of Sauces (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), which was named Cookbook of the Year by the James Beard Foundation, and Splendid Soups (Bantam, 1993). His new book, Fish & Shellfish (Morrow, 1996), is in bookstores now. ◆





Drink Wine with Asian Foods

TEXT BY LYNN FREDERICKS RECIPES BY MARCEY BASSOFF

ere's a dilemma: You love Asian food and you love wine. You'd like to enjoy a glass of wine with your spicy pork satay, but you're stumped. How do you even begin to pair the vibrant flavors found in Asian food with wine? You can't look to the cuisines themselves because there's really no tradition for bringing wine to the Asian table.

To develop a sense about pairing wine with Asian-flavored dishes, I conducted tastings with Marcey Bassoff, a New York Citychefwho incorporates Asian spices and flavorings in her cooking. Together, we brought home dishes from Cambodian, Thai, Japanese, Indian, and Korean restaurants and tried the dishes with a variety of wines—an altogether fun assignment. We weren't searching for the one perfect match for each dish; instead, we sought compatibilities between the wine and the food. What follows are some of our discoveries. Use this information as a guide to get you started on your own investigation.

BALANCING THE FLAVORS IS KEY

The basic consideration for pairing Asian foods with wine is the same for all food and wine pairings: balance. Wines with heavy alcohol or tannins (which cause a dry, sometimes puckery sensation in your mouth) will block or obliterate the pleasurable dance of flavors that is the hallmark of many Asian cuisines. Therefore, your pairings should almost always begin with low-alcohol and low- or non-tannic wines. From there, your next move is to select a wine style that will complement the dish's dominant flavor.

You'll often find a good match in a German wine. Many of the complex flavors generally found in Asian cuisine—tart, sweet, spicy, and earthy qualities—are echoed in German wines which, depending on the region and style, can be quite low in alcohol. If you're stuck, try a Riesling from Germany or Alsace; you'll rarely be disappointed. For more specific wine suggestions, I've grouped common flavors in Asian cooking. Though these groupings—hot, spicy, herbal, salty, and sour—are by no means definitive, they're good springboards for planning your pairings.

HOT FOODS CRY OUT FOR LOW ALCOHOL

Dishes featuring chiles, peppercorns, hot mustards, wasabi (Japanese horseradish), chile pastes, or

ginger need a wine with very little alcohol; otherwise, the heat from the alcohol will intensify the heat sensation from the food in the back of the palate. The fruit flavors of a typical Chardonnay from California, with 12% to 13% alcohol by volume, would barely be discernible when paired with a fiery dish, as the burn of the chiles and alcohol would leave the palate with little flavor and intense heat.

Best bets for hot foods:

- ◆ A Riesling from the Mosel region of Germany, where wines designated Kabinett level are typically 8% to 10% alcohol. Excellent acidity and a slight sweetness counters heat.
- ◆ Lighter-bodied wines with a bit more alcohol, including Italian Trebbiano, some lighter-styled Pinot Grigios, Muscadet from the Loire Valley of France, and Sylvaner from Alsace, will also work.

• Champagne and sparkling wines, though their alcohol levels are higher, are also excellent options because their effervescence tends to counteract the "burn" of the alcohol and won't cause the heat to intensify as heavier alcohol will do in still wines.

WHEN SPICE DOESN'T MEAN HEAT

Dishes with relatively little or no heat but that are brimming with earthy, aromatic spices, such as cumin, coriander, and sesame seeds, require differently styled wines. An Indian lamb curry, for example, benefits from a light-bodied red wine with inherent spiciness in the fruit.

Best bets for spicy—but not hot—food:

- ♦ A slightly peppery Spanish Rioja, which echoes the spice in the dish.
- Spicy red wines from Portugal or France's Côtes du Rhône. The grape varieties used to make these wines, which range in body, tend to have a spicy note that enhances spicy food.
- Fino sherry. A surprise hit: the nuttiness of the sherry is wonderfully heightened by the nuttiness of sesame oils and sesame seeds.

PAIR HERBS WITH HERBACEOUSNESS

The flavors of herbal aromatics such as cilantro, lemongrass, and kaffir lime leaves are greatly enhanced by wines with a similar herbaceous character,

Earthy spices meet their match in a spicy red, such as a Spanish Rioja.

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Contrast is the key to pairing wine with salty ingredients, such as fish sauce and soy sauce. A sweet or acidic wine acts as a good foil.

such as Loire Valley white wines. Such a crisp, clean wine would perfectly complement an aromatic seafood broth that you'd find at a Thai restaurant.

Best bets for herbal aromatics:

- ◆ A Vouvray made from Chenin Blanc in the Loire Valley. Choose one that's dry or semi-dry and not too sweet.
- A German Riesling from regions such as Rheingau, Mittelrhein, or Pfalz, with good acid-sugar balance to open up the palate to the aromatics.
- Lighter-styled Italian wines, such as Trebbiano and Pinot Grigio.

SALTY FLAVORS NEED CONTRAST

Certain Asian dishes emphasize saltiness in their execution. The salt can come from salt itself, or fish sauce, soy sauce, dry salted fish and shellfish, *nori* (seaweed), or miso (fermented soybean paste). Balancing the salt in the dish with a contrasting flavor or flavors in the wine is the way to go. Wines that offer a lot of sweetness or acid, or both, offer excellent

The complex flavors in German wines mirror the complex flavors in Asian cuisine.

foils for salt; they help salt do its work of enhancing the flavors of the rest of the dish.

Best bets for salty dishes:

- ◆ A German Riesling. (We weren't kidding about this wine going well with Asian flavors.) Sweet and salty flavors work as a yin-yang kind of match, and the slightly sweet wine complements salty foods.
- A sparkling wine or Champagne with a clean, crisp finish is another good choice. As with Riesling, the acid in these wines works with the salt.

SOUR FLAVORS—ALWAYS A CHALLENGE

When a food is sour, from such ingredients as lime juice, tamarind, vinegar, or pickles, a likewise sour, or acidic, wine can cancel out the acid flavor and let other flavors of the wine and food come through. Cool-climate wines, such as those from the Loire Valley, Alsace, Champagne, Germany, New Zealand, and northern California, are usually more acidic because grapes don't ripen as fully in these climates.

Best bets for sour flavors:

- ◆ The French wines Sancerre, Pouilly-Fuissé, and Muscadet are all good picks.
- ◆ A German Riesling or Scheurebe. Although acid levels are important, a little sweetness also helps balance the sour flavor in the food.

Like meets like with herbaceous wine and aromatic herbs such as cilantro or lemongrass. A clean, crisp white is your best bet.



FIND YOUR OWN FAVORITE MATCHES

The following recipes for a marinade and a spice rub incorporate some of the flavors common in Asian cuisines. We tried different wines with each and came up with some wonderful matches. Although the ingredients may be a bit unusual (look for them in Asian groceries), these recipes aren't difficult to make, and they're very versatile. Try them with friends, open a few bottles, experiment, and have fun.



Tamarind Marinade

This marinade is like an Asian barbecue sauce that's wonder-

ful on chicken, beef, and fish. The main flavor is the sour tang of the tamarind. The winning wine for this dish was a 1990 Scheurebe Auslese from Neckerauer Weisenheimer Goldberg. Aside from a perfect match of body and acidity levels between the wine and the food, the wine's honeyed, grapefruit character created an amazing new flavor when combined with the tangy sauce. Yields 4 cups, enough for eight pork chops with some left over for future use. (This sauce will keep for weeks in the refrigerator.)

the heat of hot foods

in check. Refreshing

Champagne will also

keep your palate cool.

8 oz. tamarind pulp 2 cups warm water ½ cup canola oil 8 cloves garlic, minced 2 Tbs. red curry paste ¼ cup light brown sugar 1 cup soy sauce ⅓ cup fish sauce ¼ cup rice-wine vinegar Put the tamarind in a bowl, add the water, and let soak for 10 to 15 min. Squeeze the tamarind pulp through your fingers to force out any liquid. Pour all the liquid through a strainer into another bowl. Press down on the pulp to extract as much flavor as possible. Discard any seeds. Use the tamarind liquid only.

In a heavy-based saucepan, heat the oil. Add the garlic and toast until golden. Add the curry paste and whisk until fragrant. Add the brown sugar, soy sauce, fish sauce, vinegar, and tamarind liquid and cook until the sugar dissolves. Cool the marinade to room temperature, pour just enough to cover the ingredients you're marinating, and marinate at least 6 hours, preferably overnight. Grill or broil, basting with marinade.

Asian Spice Rub

This rub, which works well on beef and pork, falls into the earthy spice category. We really liked the Spanish Rioja wines with these spices, especially a Marqués de Riscal Riserva Rioja from 1989. Next best was a San Leonino Chianti Classico from Chianti, which had an acidity and earthiness that created a wealth of earthy flavors on the palate. Yields 1½ cups, enough for eight pork chops with some left over for future use. (This rub will keep for weeks in the refrigerator.)

4 Tbs. coriander seeds
2 Tbs. cumin seeds
2 Tbs. fennel seeds
2 tsp. black mustard seeds
2 tsp. cardamom seeds
½ tsp. black onion seeds (optional)
6 whole cloves
4 bay leaves
2-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
4 large cloves garlic, chopped
¾ cup canola oil
¾ cup white-wine vinegar
4 tsp. turmeric
½ tsp. cayenne
1 tsp. kosher salt

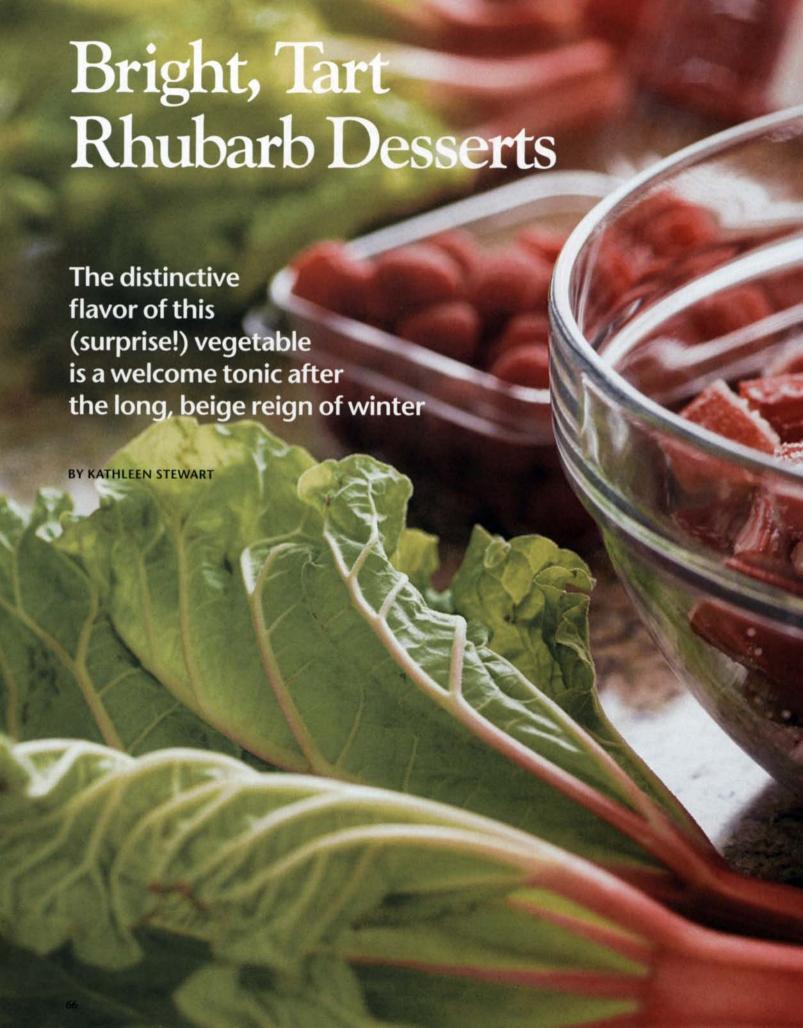
Put the coriander, cumin, fennel, black mustard seeds, cardamom, black onion seeds, cloves, and bay leaves in a heavy-based skillet and toast the spices over medium heat until fragrant, shaking the pan occasionally, about 10 min. Grind the spices to a powder and then transfer them to a bowl. Mash the ginger and garlic to a paste in a mortar and pestle (use a little of the oil and vinegar to help the paste along, if necessary). Add the ginger-garlic paste to the ground spices. Add the turmeric, cayenne, and salt. Add the remaining oil and vinegar and stir until well blended. In a heavy-based skillet, cook the paste over medium heat, stirring frequently, about 15 min.

Cool the spice mixture. Rub it on sirloin steaks, pork tenderloin, or another hearty meat. Marinate the meat for at least 6 hours and up to 2 days in the refrigerator. Grill, roast, or broil the marinated meat to preferred doneness; brush lightly with a little more spice rub before serving.

Lynn Fredericks, a food and wine consultant and writer, created the "Meet the Winemaker" series for the James Beard Foundation. Marcey Bassoff, a chef and teacher of the culinary arts, combines flavors from around the world to create a uniquely American cuisine.



Ingredients that make you pucker need a wine with high acid. The acid in the wine cancels out the acid in the dish, allowing more complex flavors to resonate.





thers may look for robins, but at my bakery in northern California, we look for the first boxes of rhubarb as the sign that spring has truly arrived. Just when we begin to tire of winter's beige food, the bright red stalks of rhubarb come to cheer us. Not only is rhubarb's tart, distinctive flavor a welcome change, but the beautiful red color adds the sparkle we've missed through the long, dark months that came before.

An open-faced galette shows off the brilliant color that results when you combine rhubarb with raspberries. The fruit is too pretty to hide beneath a crust.

You can make smaller, individual rhubarb galettes instead of one big one by simply dividing the dough and filling into four portions.



THE THINNEST STALKS ARE THE TENDEREST AND THE LEAST BITTER

From early spring to midsummer, fieldgrown rhubarb is at its peak. The stalks are dark red, sometimes streaked with green, and have a full, tart flavor that needs a good dose of sugar to make it palatable. Though rhubarb is traditionally a spring crop, enterprising farmers now raise it in hothouses, and I sometimes find it in the supermarket at odd times of the year. Hothouse rhubarb has a pinker color, the stalks are usually thinner, and the flavor less bitter. When buying either variety, choose firm stalks with no brownish edges. Thin stalks are likely to be more tender; thick ones can be tough and stringy, so you may want to peel thicker stalks with a vegetable peeler before you cook them.

A crown of bright green leaves is a good sign: they indicate that the stalks were a relatively recent harvest. Always









Stewed rhubarb gives a slightly rough texture to this Rhubarb-Ginger Fool. For a smoother texture, purée the rhubarb mixture before you chill it.

Take care to preserve the lightness of the freshly whipped cream by using gentle strokes when folding in the puréed rhubarb. discard the leaves before cooking, however; they contain oxalic acid, which is quite poisonous.

Wash and dry the stalks and cut off the ends if they're soft and brown or show signs of rotting. Wrap the stalks in a damp dishtowel or paper towel and refrigerate until ready to use.

A VEGETABLE THAT PRETENDS IT'S A FRUIT

Botanically speaking, rhubarb is a vegetable, but pastry cooks long ago adopted it as a fruit. An easy-to-grow perennial that flourishes once it's established, rhubarb was grown all over North America and Europe in the 19th century. Cooks of that era used it so often in their pies that rhubarb came to be known as "pie

plant." In many old cookbooks, I still find it called by that name.

Rhubarb has very little natural sugar. When cooked without anything to sweeten it, it's quite sour, with a flavor some compare to sorrel. But add sugar and rhubarb takes on an intriguing sweetand-sour taste.

An exceptionally juicy fruit. To look at a raw stalk of rhubarb, you wouldn't think of it as juicy, but when cooked, rhubarb releases a surprising amount of liquid. When you're stewing rhubarb, there's no need to add any water to the pan. Heated for just a few minutes, the stalks will release enough of their own juices to sufficiently soften the fruit. Field-grown rhubarb tends to have a higher water content than hothouse

varieties and sometimes needs to be drained before it's used.

Occasionally, a recipe will call for rhubarb to be cooked before it's used in a cobbler, tart, or pie, but I never bother. I simply toss cut pieces of rhubarb with sugar and flour and let them sit for five or ten minutes before putting it in the pastry. The sugar draws out the rhubarb's juices, and the flour thickens them. After that, the cooking time is sufficient to soften the rhubarb thoroughly.

RHUBARB STANDS ALONE OR AS AN ACCENT TO OTHER FRUITS

Rhubarb has a strong, distinctive flavor that's wonderful all on its own, but its tartness makes it a pleasant accent to other fruits as well. The acidity of many citrus fruits—particularly oranges—goes well with rhubarb. More mellow fruits, like apples, can benefit from a pairing with the red stalks.

Rhubarb with strawberries is a timehonored combination, but I prefer rhubarb with raspberries, which I think stand up better than strawberries to the heat of the oven. Sweet spices, such as cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves, complement its flavor; I like rhubarb with fresh ginger, too.

Rhubarb-Raspberry Galette

This rustic tart is wonderful served warm with vanilla ice cream. To make individual galettes, roll the dough into four 8-inch circles and divide the filling between them. Flour and butter amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups or tablespoons). Use either measurement. Yields one 12-inch tart or four 6-inch tarts.

FOR THE DOUGH:

10 oz. (2½ cups) all-purpose flour 1 tsp. sugar ½ tsp. salt 6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small pieces ½ cup ice water

FOR THE FILLING: 1½ lb. rhubarb 1 cup raspberries 3 Tbs. flour 1 to 1¼ cups sugar

Melted butter for brushing Sugar for sprinkling

To make the dough—Combine the flour, sugar, and salt; cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add the ice water and toss just until the mixture holds together. Be careful not to overmix.

Press the dough into a ball, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate at least 30 min.

Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment. On a lightly floured work surface, roll out the chilled dough into a 14-inch circle, about ½ inch thick. Transfer the dough to the prepared baking sheet and refrigerate while preparing the filling. (It's important to keep the dough as cold as possible until you're ready to bake.)

To make the filling—Trim the ends of the rhubarb and, if the stalks are more than 1 inch thick, cut them in half lengthwise. Cut the stalks into 1-inch-long pieces. In a large bowl, gently toss the rhubarb and raspberries with the flour and sugar. Let stand until moist, 5 to 10 min.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Gently spread the fruit in the center of the chilled pastry, leaving a 2-inch margin around the edge. Carefully fold the edge of the dough over the fruit, pleating it as you go. Brush the edge of the dough with melted butter and sprinkle with sugar.

Bake until the pastry is golden brown and the fruit is soft and bubbling, 45 to 55 min. Set on a rack to cool slightly.

Rhubarb-Ginger Fool

This dessert is called a fool because, well, almost anyone can make it. Just combine the stewed fruit with freshly whipped cream. *Yields 7 cups; serves six.*

1½ to 2 lb. rhubarb 1 to 1¼ cups sugar 2 Tbs. chopped candied ginger 2 Tbs. freshly grated ginger 2 cups heavy cream

Trim the ends of the rhubarb and, if the stalks are more than 1 inch thick, cut them in half lengthwise. Cut the stalks into 1-inch-long pieces.

In a stainless-steel pan with a tight-fitting lid, combine the rhubarb, sugar, candied ginger, and fresh ginger. (There's no need to add water; though it will look dry at first, the rhubarb will release enough water to cook without scorching.) Cook over low heat until the rhubarb is tender and falling apart, about 30 min. Refrigerate until well chilled.

Whip the cream until it holds soft peaks. Gently fold in the chilled rhubarb mixture until well combined. Spoon into serving glasses or bowls and chill until ready to serve.



Rhubarb Compote with Oranges & Figs

This compote is a stunning combination of flavors and colors. *Yields 7 cups; serves six to eight.*

1½ lb. rhubarb 4½ cups water 3 cups sugar 2 oranges 12 fresh Black Mission, Kadota, or Adriatic-type figs

Trim the rhubarb and cut it into 1-inch-long pieces; you should have about 6 cups. In a 4-qt. stainless-steel pan, combine the water and sugar and stir to dissolve the sugar. Bring the mixture to a boil, add the rhubarb, and cook until tender but not falling apart, 7 to 10 min. With a slotted spoon, transfer the rhubarb to a large bowl. Reserve the cooking liquid in its pan.

Grate the zest from both oranges; you should have about 3 Tbs. zest. Add 2 Tbs. of the zest to the liquid used to cook the rhubarb and continue to cook the syrup over medium-high heat for 15 to 20 min. Meanwhile, with a paring knife, cut off the ends of the oranges. Remove the remaining peel and





Rhubarb brings a refreshing tartness to the comforting taste of an apple crisp.

all the white pith. Cut each orange into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick slices and cut each slice in half. Trim the ends of the figs and cut them into quarters. Add the orange slices, figs, and remaining orange zest to the rhubarb. Strain the cooking liquid; you should have $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 cups. Pour this syrup over the fruit. Chill several hours or overnight before serving.

Note: To substitute dried figs for fresh, make a syrup with 2 cups water and ½ cup sugar flavored with 1 Tbs. grated orange zest and half of a vanilla bean. Simmer this syrup for about 5 min. before adding 12 to 15 dried Black Mission or Calmyra figs. Continue simmering until the figs are tender, 30 to 45 min. Chill the figs in their poaching liquid before adding them to the compote. Don't use the fig-poaching liquid as part of the compote syrup—it tends to taste stemmy.

Apple-Rhubarb Crisp

Crisps are old-fashioned comfort food. I like them best served warm with a generous pour of fresh cream. *Serves eight*.

FOR THE TOPPING:

 $4\frac{1}{2}$ oz. (1 cup) flour

3 oz. (²/₃ cup packed) brown sugar

3 Tbs. sugar

1/4 cup finely chopped to asted almonds or walnuts

½ tsp. ground cinnamon

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) butter, slightly softened and cut into small pieces

FOR THE FILLING:

2 lb. crisp baking apples (I like Gravensteins or Sierra Beauties)

1½ lb. rhubarb

1 to 1½ cups sugar

4 Tbs. flour

1 tsp. ground cinnamon



There's no need to cook the fruit before adding it to the crisp. Toss rhubarb and apples with sugar and flour to sweeten and thicken the juices; the fruit makes its own delicious sauce as it cooks.

To make the topping—In a bowl, mix together the flour, brown sugar, sugar, nuts, and cinnamon. Work in the butter until the mixture resembles dry oats. The mixture should just hold together and look crumbly.

To make the filling—Heat the oven to 350°F. Peel, core, and quarter the apples. Cut each quarter into four chunks; you should have about 5 cups. Trim the rhubarb and cut it into 1-inch-long pieces ½ inch wide; you should have about 5 cups of rhubarb. In a large bowl, toss the apples and rhubarb with the sugar, flour, and cinnamon until well coated. Transfer the apple and rhubarb mixture to a 2-qt. baking dish and sprinkle the crisp topping over the top. Bake until the topping is golden brown and the fruit is bubbling, 1 hour to 1 hour, 15 min. Cool slightly before serving.

Kathleen Stewart is on the lookout for rhubarb in Healdsburg, California, where she is a partner at the Downtown Bakery.



Making sense of Asian noodles

Searching for the right Asian noodle for a particular dish can be confusing. That's because two major types of Asian noodles are both referred to as—and this is even more misleading—vermicelli. One is made from rice and the other from mung bean starch. Both kinds of noodles are found in Asian markets and increasingly in many supermarkets.

Although the noodles may look alike, their differences are significant, and they need to be handled differently.

RICE NOODLES: TENDER AND VELVETY

I like to use rice noodles in soups, salads, and stir-fries. Plain, they're quite bland, but they absorb the flavors of the broth or sauce in which they're served.

Rice noodles, also called rice sticks and rice vermicelli, come in a variety of thickThe two major types of Asian noodles—rice and mung bean—are packaged similarly and usually come in skeins.

nesses, from the thinnest threads to wide noodles. They're brittle and milky white when dry, and they often come in 8- or 16-ounce packages, usually containing 4-ounce skeins. I generally figure 1 to 2 ounces per person, depending on how substantial the other ingredients in the dish are.

How to prepare rice noodles. Rice noodles must

be softened by soaking in hot water before cooking; the time depends on the thickness of the noodle and how hot the water is, anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes. They should be drained before cooking to get rid of any excess starch. Once softened, rice noodles cook quickly and should be added only at the last minute to stir-fries and soups. Rice noodles may also be used for cold salads: soften them first, simmer them for a minute or two in water, and then rinse with cold water.

BEAN THREADS: CLEAR AND PLEASANTLY CHEWY

These noodles have a handful of picturesque names in addition to vermicelli: they're also called glass noodles, cellophane noodles, and long rope. Made from mung bean starch, dried bean threads come in a variety of thicknesses, but the most common are the very thin threads. which turn slippery and pleasantly gummy when cooked. They're a wonderful component to soups, stir-fries, and—because of their tenacious texture which doesn't

get mushy—slow-cooked braises and Chinese hotpots. They don't do nearly as well as rice noodles in cold dishes, however; their rubbery texture becomes much less appetizing when cold.

Be careful how you buy your packages of bean threads because they're sharp and tough and almost impossible to break or cut when uncooked. I recently wrestled with an 8-ounce skein of bean threads, finally using a cleaver to hack off 2 ounces. You can avoid this by buying them in packages that contain bundles of about 2 ounces each, which is about two servings.

How to prepare bean threads. Like rice noodles. bean threads must be softened for a few minutes in warm water and drained before cooking. Once softened, use scissors to cut the threads into more manageable 4- to 6-inch lengths. (If you don't, you'll discover why these noodles are called long rope.) After soaking, these noodles should be simmered for 5 to 10 minutes, during which time they will absorb almost three times their weight in liquid. They don't need to be rinsed after cooking because they aren't very starchy.

Not all noodles are created equal. Although these Asian noodles are both called vermicelli and look similar when dry, they cook quite differently. On the left are bean threads, which become translucent and chewy; on the right, rice noodles, which remain opaque and have a velvety texture.

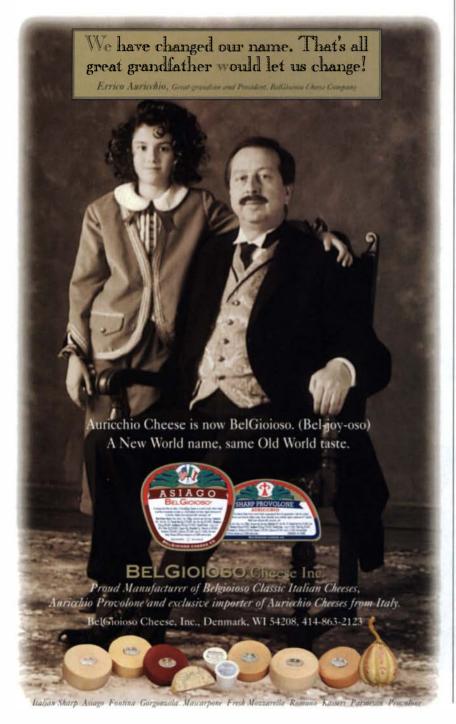
Peeling asparagus for tenderness

Many people favor the tip of asparagus over the stalk, but that doesn't mean the rest of the spear should be ignored. While the tips are irresistibly tender, the stalks have just as much flavor and can be

SECRETS TO A MEMORABLE DINNER PARTY...

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A few strokes of the peeler give you tender stalks. Be sure to use a light touch and take off just the thinnest layer.

tender if they're peeled before cooking.

Some people argue that thin asparagus needs no peeling, but I have found both thick and thin asparagus are better when peeled. The stringy fibrous "skin" on anything but the freshest asparagus detracts from the pure pleasure of eating lightly steamed spears.

Peeling the stalks also solves the problem of the tips cooking faster than the stalks. A peeled stalk will cook faster than an unpeeled stalk.

A labor of love. Fresh asparagus is always a bit of an indulgence, so to me the little effort involved in peeling is justifiable. Wait to peel the asparagus until just before cooking. After a quick rinse, lay a spear flat on your cutting board. Holding the tip in one hand and a vegetable peeler in the other, start peeling about 2 inches down the stalk (just beneath the tip). Use a light touch and peel only the thinnest layer of outer skin and triangular scales. If the asparagus has a thick or heavy skin, you may need to apply a bit more pressure as you get towards the cut end. Keep turning the spear and peeling until all sides are done.

Some thick asparagus spears are considerably fatter at the base than at the tip. In this case, I whittle away the excess thickness with my

peeler to leave a straight stalk that will cook evenly.

After the asparagus is peeled, snap or cut off any woody, lighter colored base. If you need to peel the asparagus ahead of time, wrap it in a moist towel and refrigerate until needed.

Grind and heat spices for best flavor

One of the simplest ways to boost flavor and improve your cooking is to toss out stale jars of dried ground spices and to buy whole spices to grind yourself. Heating a spice, whether toasting it dry or frying it in a bit of oil, further enhances its flavor, giving the spice a fuller character.

Grind whole spices for freshness and flavor. Whole spices have four times the shelf life of ground spices because their seed coatings and barks protect their flavors, which aren't released until they are ground or heated. A coffee grinder devoted to spices makes grinding a snap, though you can also grind spices, especially small quantities, in a mortar and pestle.

Try toasting spices for an even deeper flavor. Whole spices work best for toasting because ground spices can burn easily. Some people like to roast their spices in the oven, but I like the control I get by toasting them on the stove where I can see them. Because spices burn easily, it's important to use a heavybased pan over gentle heat. Shake the pan or stir the spices with a wooden spoon as they heat. They're ready when they become highly aromatic and turn slightly darker, which usually takes just a couple of minutes, but can take as long as five minutes, depending on the spice, the heat, and the pan.

Once toasted, immediately pour the spices out of



Toasting spices gives them a deeper, nuttier flavor. Cooking them on the stove lets you keep an eye on them and enjoy their fragrance.

the pan to stop them from cooking further. Let the toasted spices cool, and then grind them. They can be stored tightly covered for a few weeks without losing much of their flavor.

You can toast more than one kind of spice at a time.

Whole spices have four times the shelf life of ground spices.

Begin with those that will take longest and add any ground spices at the very end, just before taking the pan off the heat.

Hot oil also brings out a spice's flavor. Cooking spices in oil is a method most of us use all the time without recognizing it as anything special. Every time you heat oil in a pan and add some chopped garlic, you're effectively doing the same thing. The flavor of the garlic is intensified and the oil becomes infused with the garlic's flavor to permeate the finished dish.

It's messy to try to grind spices after they've been cooked in oil, so use the spices in the form you want them to end up in. I often toss ground spices in warm oil for a moment before adding other ingredients. Ground spices are ready in fewer than 10 seconds; whole spices take about 30 seconds. Some seeds, such as mustard seeds, pop ferociously when they hit the hot oil, so stand back.

Molly Stevens, a contributing editor for Fine Cooking, is a chef/instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont.

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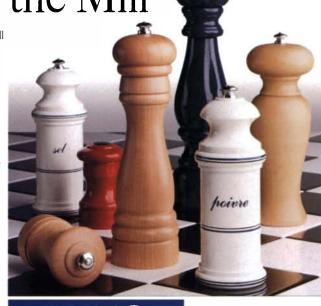
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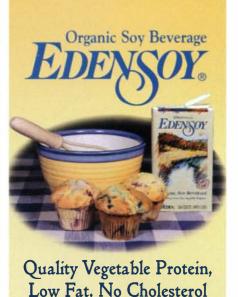
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1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1-2 tablespoons lemon zest

1 cup raisins

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APRIL/MAY 1996 75



The Amazing Culinary Powers of Eggs

Get moist cakes, grease-free coatings, satiny custards (and that's not all) thanks to whites and yolks

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

Eggs are such a basic, everyday ingredient, so tidy and unassuming in their pale shells, that it's easy to overlook their powerful and diverse functions in cooking. And most cooks think of an egg as an egg instead of as two separate components—white and yolk—that have vastly different characters.

But eggs are more than just partners for bacon on

Sunday morning. When combined with other ingredients, whole eggs, yolks, or whites perform critical functions, such as giving structure, creating lightness, blending and binding incompatible ingredients, and drying and crisping pastries. The right amount of whole eggs, whites, or yolks in the right condition (beaten or not, cooked or raw) can mean the difference between an

Get to know an egg and you'll improve your cooking. Each part of this simple food has important effects on other ingredients.

extraordinary dish and an okay one—or even a disaster.

EGGS ARE MADE OF PROTEIN AND FAT

Whites and volks are very different. In a "large" egg (weighing about 2 ounces), the white weighs about 1 ounce. It's made mainly of water and protein, contains lots of vitamins and minerals, but only about 17 calories. The yolk, which weighs about half an ounce, contains fat and cholesterol, little protein, more vitamins and minerals, and around 60 calories. Together, the white and the yolk are a potent nutrition powerhouse, containing the highest quality food protein known.

The culinary functions of eggs are so many and varied that I've compiled the most important ones into a chart (opposite). Once you really understand what each part of the egg does, you can modify recipes to take better advantage of the particular powers of yolks and whites.

YOLKS SMOOTH, THICKEN, AND MOISTEN

Whenever you want an unbelievably smooth texture, egg yolks are key because they contain emulsifiers, notably lecithin. An emulsifier is a compound with one end that dissolves in fat and one that dissolves in water, meaning ingredients that normally don't mix well will blend together smoothly and willingly when egg yolks are present.

If your crème caramel recipe is nice but not heavenly, think about adding yolks. Diana Kennedy's flan recipe has a remarkable satiny texture; she uses 4 whole eggs plus 6 yolks per quart of milk.

Yolks also improve the texture of starch-bound custards such as pastry cream or pie filling; however, raw yolks contain an enzyme, alpha amylase, that can destroy a set starch custard. If you don't bring the mixture back to a boil after the eggs are added, your very thick custard will be converted to soup overnight.

When a dish containing whole eggs is too dry, switch some of the whole eggs to yolks. I had a restaurant call me because their hot



This used to be a thick cream-pie filling, but now it's soup. The yolks weren't boiled after they were added to the starch and milk mixture so an enzyme in the yolks turned thick to thin.

rolls were drying out near the end of serving time. When they switched half of the whole eggs in the recipe to yolks, the rolls stayed moist longer.

WHITES DRY, REPEL GREASE, GIVE STRUCTURE

When you need to dry out a dish, whites are ideal. Large cream puffs or rings made with the standard 4-whole-egg choux pastry recipe don't

Egg yolks absorb grease, but egg whites dry, puff, and don't absorb much fat during cooking.

thoroughly dry inside, even if you puncture the puffs to let the steam out. The insides usually stay a little gooey. If the puffs are made with 2 whole eggs and 2½ whites, they turn out dry and crisp, an ideal contrast to satiny-smooth pastry cream (made with extra yolks).

When you're deep-frying and want light, nongreasy results, egg whites are ideal, either in batter coatings, like tempura, or in dishes made from heavier batters, such as fritters and hush puppies. Yolks absorb grease, but whites dry, puff, and don't absorb much fat during cooking. I rescued a restaurant's hush puppies by changing the 12 large whole eggs per batch to the same volume of eggs using 6 whole eggs and about 9 whites. The 6 yolks kept them from being too dry or

rubbery, but the added whites made them dramatically lighter and not at all greasy.

Unbeaten whites can be a better choice. Beaten egg-white foams are sometimes folded into cake batters to make a lighter cake. The beaten whites will get the cake up but, unfortunately, they won't keep it up. If you don't want the cake to fall (like a soufflé will), some unbeaten white will be needed.

In a raw egg white, the proteins are curled like bed-springs, with bonds across the coils holding each protein in a tight individual unit. When you beat egg whites until firm peaks form, the bonds break, and the protein "springs" unwind with their bonds sticking out. Immediately they run into another unwound protein and loosely join together around the air bubbles, stabilizing the egg white foam.

Essentially, the whites in a stiff foam are already partially "cooked." They have set the structure of the foam but are no longer available to set and



Whipped whites can mean fallen cakes. The cake on the left acts more like a soufflé because it has no unbeaten white to help it set. The cake on the right, with unbeaten whites. is tall and firm.

hold the cake. In the oven, the bubbles in the foam puff and the cake rises beautifully, but if there aren't some raw egg proteins that haven't unwound and are still available to set and hold this rise, the cake falls like a soufflé.

The instability of whipped egg whites can trick cooks who are trying to lighten recipes by replacing whole eggs with whites. A friend's low-fat loaf cake rose beautifully and was perfect when she took it out of the oven, but within a minute or two, it fell. The cake had 1 yolk and

4 whipped egg whites—it had only 1 raw yolk to cook, set, and hold the whole cake up.

I suggested switching to a whole egg and 1 or 2 unbeaten whites that could unwind, cook, set, and help hold the cake. She could still fold in 1 or 2 whipped egg whites for lightness. You can see the difference in the two cake formulas in the photos above.

Shirley O. Corriher, of Atlanta, Georgia, teaches food science and cooking classes across the country. She is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking. ◆

	SOME OF THE VITAL ROLES EGGS PLAY IN COOKING								
Whole eggs:									
Give structure	The proteins in eggs coagulate when heated, forming a resilient but firm web that helps hold together sauces, baked goods, and dishes such as meatloaf.								
Leaven	When air is incorporated into eggs by beating (either just a little or a lot, as in eggs beaten to the ribbon stage) the eggs will puff during cooking to leaven whatever they're in.								
Glaze and color	Whole eggs, whites, or yolks can be brushed on breads and pastries and baked to g a rich, shiny glaze. Both whites and yolks are high in protein, which encourages bro ing, so dishes incorporating eggs also take on a deeper golden color.								
Egg yolks:									
Bind and thicken	Natural emulsifiers, such as lecithin, hold fat and water together in an emulsion to thicken sauces such as hollandaise and mayonnaise.								
Give smoothness	Egg yolks can create a creamy, satiny-smooth texture in everything from chocolate truffles to custards. Their emulsifying power means they bind liquids with fats for sensational smoothness.								
Egg whites:									
Dry and crisp	Egg whites contain no fat and can create a dry protein lattice when heated. They he give things like cream puffs a drier, crisper consistency, but too many egg whites in a cake or muffin will make it dry and unpleasant.								
Clarify	When mixed with stock and slowly heated, the proteins in egg whites coagulate to trap particles and make the stock crystal-clear.								

APRIL/MAY 1996 77

Books that Celebrate the Joys of Baking Bread

Master bakers share the secrets of sourdoughs, French breads, and focaccias

BY FRAN GAGE

Since 1984, I've made my daily bread by baking bread. When I'm looking for inspiration for a new kind of bread, I turn to the books reviewed here. More than just recipe collections, they are my colleagues in the kitchen. Each of them has taught me something valuable, like how bleached flour came into vogue, or what I need to know to work with Italian wet doughs. Through them I've made nostalgic trips to European bakeries and attended the wheat harvest with a Midwestern farmer. One even helped me build a brick oven at my country home.

Elizabeth David's English Bread and Yeast Cookery was first published in 1977 (a new American edition was released in 1994) and is the book cited by many of today's bakers as one of their most important sources of inspiration.

This exhaustive yet thoroughly fascinating study is the result of David's extensive research into grains, milling history, types of flour, yeast, equipment, and storageand reflects her belief that "if bread is to be a life companion, then we had best be choosey about it." Despite its technical depth, English Bread

English Bread and though I usually prefer a simple dough for pizza, David's recipe, which contains an egg and a bit of Yeast 🔊 milk, makes a crust I like very much. Cookery No serious student of bread baking should be without this book, Elizabeth Baking lore and technique from England's most celebrated food writer. and Yeast Cookery is by no means dry reading. British-born David is one of the food BERNARD CLAYTON world's finest writ-

ers. Whether she's dis-

cussing a grain of wheat or European village bakeries, her work is a delight to read.

Curious about her suggestion for baking bread in a flowerpot, I found that terracotta molds produce a fine loaf with a crisp crust. Her veasted quiche dough brings a rustic touch to the now ubiquitous egg tarts. AlRecipes for every imaginable type of bread, including soda crackers and dog biscuits.

but even cooks who simply love good bread and fine words will find much to savor in these pages.

The first breads I ever baked came from Bernard Clayton's book, The Breads of

France. Now the recipes from that book have been collected, along with ones for almost every conceivable type of bread, in the latest edition of Bernard Clayton's New Complete Book of Breads.

His recipes, always clear and concise, are very good ones for beginners. Clayton routinely gives directions for mixing dough by hand, by heavy-duty mixer, and with a food processor. Novices and experienced bakers alike will appreciate the section called "What Went Wrong-and How to Make it Right."

In my fledgling days as a baker, I often made his version of the classic French bread. Pain Ordinaire Carême. Years later, when I had my own bakery, his recipes inspired some

of my most successful loaves. A version of his Portuguese Corn Bread was wildly popular. The mildly sweet French corn bread called Gâteau au Mais and a loaf made with fresh strawberries are examples of the unusual and refreshing recipes offered here.

The book has a whimsical side. A taste of his dog's dinner inspired Clayton to develop a recipe for biscuits that would be "palatable to beast and man alike." The recipe has provoked scores of thankyou notes from dogs across the country.

But perhaps the most exciting instructions in the book are his directions for building an adobe oven. My husband and I built one according to Clayton's directions, and it has since baked some fine loaves and roasted a few Thanksgiving turkeys.

Carol Field's book, The Italian Baker, is as much a

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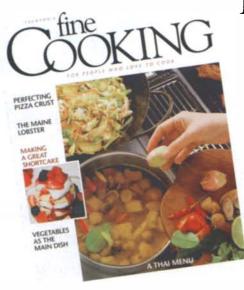
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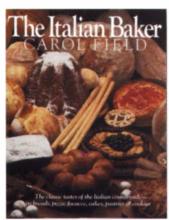


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Regional breads and the stories behind them make this book the equivalent of a culinary tour of Italy.

culinary tour of Italy as it is a collection of recipes. Her book is an exploration of bread's role in the history and culture of Italy, with recipes from every region of that country.

Field uses just the right words to lead home bakers

through the challenges presented by the wet doughs that characterize so many of Italy's rustic breads. Carefully placed drawings enhance her words. In all her recipes, Field describes how the dough should look at different stages.

Her recipe for the old-style

recipes for Italy's wonderful tarts, cakes, and cookies.

In his preface to *The Village Baker*, Joe Ortiz laments that when he started making bread, he couldn't find a book on the professional craft of baking. Instead, he turned to the village bakers of Europe to

was eager to try Ortiz's version, made with just flour and water. I used it to make his San Francisco Sourdough. The bread had a wonderful crust and an irregular chewy interior.

Judging when sourdoughs are ready can be difficult, especially for someone working with them for the first time.

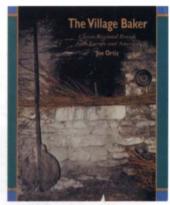
Field's recipe for raisin bread is cause for raisin lovers to rejoice.

Como Bread (what Italians call French bread) yields a chewy loaf with a porous interior and a fine taste of the grain. Field's recipe for raisin bread is cause for raisin lovers to rejoice. At my bakery, I followed her suggestion to make the dough into focaccia. It was a breakfast favorite.

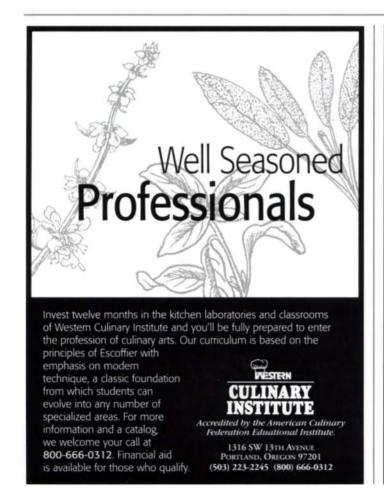
The book also has a section called "Dolci" that's full of

learn his craft. In *The Village Baker*, he takes us to the "dusty basement bakeries" of France, Italy, and Germany, where he learned the ancient methods of using sourdough, the advantages of slow fermentation, and the benefits of using less-refined flours.

I'm a true believer in making sourdough starters without commercial yeast, and I



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but Ortiz has an ingenious tip. Put a small piece of the dough in a jar of water. When the dough floats to the top, the loaves are ready to bake.

Ortiz's recipe for the bread called *La Flute Gana*—a specialty of the Ganachaud/ Jeudon bakery in Paris—is so similar to the crusty, flavorful bread I tasted there that I've stopped trying to duplicate the Parisian version. I now use his recipe instead.

Daniel Leader wrote *Bread Alone* (with Joan Blahnik) and runs a bakery in New York state by the same name. Early in his career, Leader set out to know everything about bread, not only how it's made, but also where the ingredients come from and who the farmers are who grow the grain.

Leader is very enthusiastic and dramatic about making



An enthusiastic baker shares his passion for bread.

bread. He's also straightforward about his biases. I appreciate his stance on bread machines (against) and thank him for including weights in every recipe. His discussion of the importance of the temperature of the dough and the room where it's made is detailed and easily understood.

Leader's recipe for a classic baguette makes a beautiful, chewy loaf. But despite its good looks, I found it bland. I made his sourdough starter (which includes a small amount of commercial yeast), and used it in the bread he calls My Personal Favorite Pain Au Levain. It's a handsome loaf with a porous interior, but I wish it had a little more tang. His Buttermilk Currant Bread is a favorite of mine and makes great breakfast toast.

Timetables for each recipe are helpful. Unfortunately, recipes that run on for as long as three pages make the book difficult to work from. It's hard to turn pages when your hands are buried deep in the dough.

PUBLISHING INFORMATION English Bread and Yeast Cookery, by Elizabeth David. Biscuit
Books, 1994. \$25, hardcover;
626 pp. ISBN 0-9643600-0-4.
Bernard Clayton's New Complete
Book of Breads. Simon &
Schuster, 1987. \$20, softcover;
748 pp. ISBN 0-684-81174-X.
The Italian Baker, by Carol Field.
Harper Collins, 1985. \$30,
hardcover; 444 pp. ISBN
0-06-181266-8.

The Village Baker, by Joe Ortiz. Ten Speed Press, 1993. \$24.95, hardcover; 306 pp. ISBN 0-89815-489-8.

Bread Alone, by Daniel Leader & Judith Blahnik. William Morrow, 1993. \$25, hardcover; 332 pp. ISBN 0-688-09261-6.

Fran Gage opened her San Francisco bakery, Pâtisserie Française, in 1984 and closed it after a fire in 1995. She is now consulting and working on a baking book.



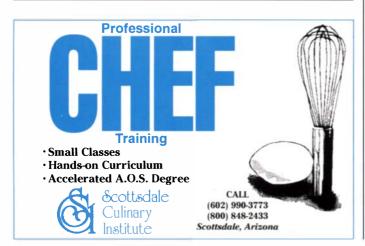
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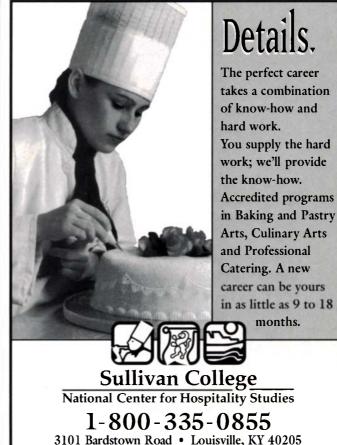
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CALENDAR

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September issue is May 1.

ALASKA

Kodiak Crab Festival—May 23–27, Kodiak. A celebration of the Alaska kingcrab and a tribute to the commercial fishing industry that has made Kodiak one of the top fishing ports in the United States. Call 907/486-5557.

CALIFORNIA

Lake County Spring Wine Adventure—April 27–28. Open House at the tasting rooms of participating Lake County wineries. Call Lake County Grape Growers Association at 707/263-0911 or Lake County Visitor Information Center at 800/525-3743.

California Strawberry Festival—May 18–19, College Park, Oxnard. Call 805/385-7578.

COLORADO

The Aspen Food & Wine Magazine Classic—June 14–16, Aspen. Call 800/494-6395.

CONNECTICUT

Windsor Shad Derby Festival—May 18, Town Green, Windsor. Food festival featuring a shad fish dinner and shad-fishing awards and other events. Call 860/688-5165.

FI ORIDA

Florida Winefest & Auction—April 25–28, The Resort at Longboat Key Club, Sarasota. Series of brunches, dinners, wine tastings, seminars, and a charity wine auction. Call 941/952-1109.

Zellwood Sweet Corn Festival—May 25–26, Ponkan Road, Zellwood. Call 407/886-0014.

KENTUCKY

The Cooks' Choice Award— March 7 through April 15. Home cooks are invited to vote for their favorite cookbook from among the list of 30 nominees for the Julia Child Cookbook Awards. Entry deadline is April 15. If your entry is selected in the drawing, you'll win an all-expenses-paid trip for two to Philadelphia, where you'll attend a special dinner hosted by Julia Child and join the festivities as the Book of the Year is announced during the Julia Child Cookbook Awards Gala on Saturday, April 27. Sponsored by the International Association of Culinary Profession-

als. For a ballot, call 502/587-7953, or write to the IACP, 304 W. Liberty Street, Suite 201, Louisville, KY 40202.

LOUISIANA

The Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival—May 3–5, Breaux Bridge. Call 318/332-6655.

MASSACHUSETTS

Cheesemaking Workshops—April 13, May 11, June 22, New England Cheesemaking Supply Company, Ashfield. One-day workshops on basic principles of home cheesemaking, equipment, and types of milk. Includes a full day of cheesemaking: gouda, mozzarella, crème fraîche, queso blanco, mascarpone, ricotta, and more. To register, call 413/628-3808.

Boston Brewers Festival—May 18, Bayside Exposition Center, Boston. Public tasting of a wide variety of micro, specialty, and limited-release beers from Canadian and American brewers. For information, call 617/547-6311. For tickets, call 617/931-2000.

MICHIGAN

National Morel Mushroom Festival—May 17–19, Sunset Park, Boyne City. Seminar and guided foraging for wild edibles, National Morel Mushroom Hunting Championship, guided morel tours, and morel specialties from local restaurants. Call 616/582-6222.

NEW YORK

Cooking Classes—Peter Kump's School of Culinary Arts, New York City. April 1–5: Techniques of Pastry & Baking. Five days of intensive classes for the recreational baker. April 12–13: Chocolate Workshop with Nick Malgieri. April 16 & 17: Four Seasonally Inspired Demonstration Classes with Madeleine Kamman. April 27–28: Wedding Cake Workshop with Toba Garrett. May 17: The Ultimate Champagne Tasting with Willie Gluckstern; May 4–5: Food Styling Workshop with John Carafoli. Call 212/410-4601.

James Beard's 93rd Birthday Dinner—April 28, The Metropolitan Club, New York City. A multicourse dinner prepared by a team of 1995 James Beard Award-winning chefs. Call 212/675-4984 or 800/36-BEARD.

6th Annual James Beard Awards— April 29, The New York Marriott Marquis, New York City. Saluting the top chefs, restaurants, cookbook authors, and restaurant designers in the U.S. Call 212/675-4984 or 800/36-BEARD.

James Beard Foundation's Annual Culinary Festival—May 3–4, The Winter Garden at the World Financial Center, New York City. A culinary celebration features tastings, demonstrations, and cookbook signings. Call 212/675-4984 or 800/36-BEARD.

OHIC

Taste of Cincinnati—May 25–27, Central Parkway, Cincinnati. Call 513/333-6888. 22nd Old-Fashioned Ice Cream Festival—May 25–27, State Rt. 13, Utica. Call Howard Stone at 614/892-3463.

PENNSYLVANIA

12th Annual "The Book & the Cook"—April 21–28, Philadelphia. Cookbook authors collaborate with top Philadelphia restaurants and chefs to design special meals. Call 800/537-7676; TTD, 215/636-3403.

7th Annual "The Book & the Cook" Fair—April 26–28, Philadelphia Civic Center. Showcase of gourmet food and kitchenware, plus cooking demonstrations by cookbook authors and Philadelphia chefs. Call 800/537-7676; TTD. 215/636-3403.

Rhubarb Festival—May 18, Kitchen Kettle Village, Intercourse. Rhubarb cooking contest and other events. Call 800/732-3538.

RHODE ISLAND

Shad Bloom & Pasta Cook-Off—May 11, Block Island. An Island tour of the Shad Blossoms, followed by tastings from local restaurants competing for the best pasta dish. Call 800/383-2474 or 401/466-2982.

Taste of Block Island Seafood Festival—June 22, Harbor Baptist Church, Block Island. Call 800/383-2474 or 401/466-2982.

SOUTH CAROLINA

16th Annual Crawfish Festival—April 27, Pawleys Island. Call 803/651-1010 or 803/237-1921.

TENNESSEE

43rd Annual Cosby Ramp Festival—May 5, Kineaubista Hill, Cosby. Includes a ramp breakfast, an afternoon barbecue, music, and other events. Call Duaine Click at 423/623-0786.

TEXAS

Dallas Farmers' Market Chef's Cooking Class Series—April 20 through June 15, Dallas. Seasonal cooking classes with Dallas chefs demonstrating their favorite dishes using fresh spring produce. Classes are held nine consecutive Saturdays. Sponsored by The American Institute of Wine & Food and Farmers' Market Friends. Call 214/939-2808.

VERMONT

29th Vermont Maple Festival—April 19–21, St. Albans. Celebrations and exhibits centering on the first Vermont harvest of the year. Call 802/524-5800.

VIRGINIA

Eastern Shore Seafood Festival—May 1, Tom's Cove Campground, Chincoteague Island. Call 804/787-2460.

WASHINGTON, DC

AIWFRare Wine Auction—May 11, The Mayflower Hotel. A benefit for the educational programs and publications of the American Institute of Wine & Food. Call 415/255-3000.

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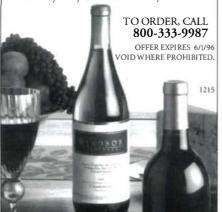
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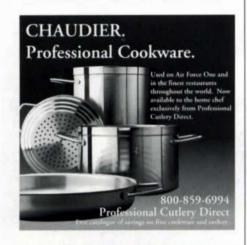
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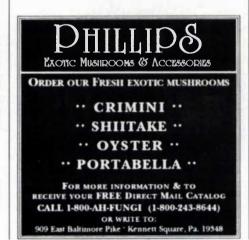


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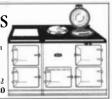




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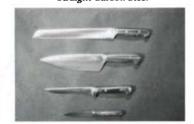
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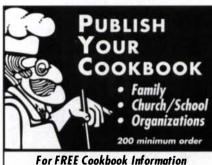
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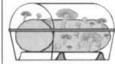
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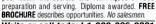
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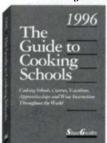
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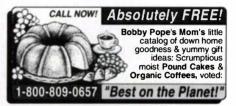
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Pork with Cumin-Scented Tomatoes	29	320	58%	25	10	21	3	11	5	65	1020	2	
Pork with Honey, Mustard & Rosemary	30	200	39%	24	7	9	2	5	1	65	470	0	
Pork with Apple Chutney	30	290	52%	23	11	17	3	9	3	65	1110	2	
Caesar Salad Dressing	34	190	95%	2	1	20	3	15	2	40	290	0	
Catalan Potatoes	34	190	59%	2	19	12	2	9	1	0	370	2	using nonstick pan
Garlic Roast Chicken	34	880	65%	57	21	63	24	27	8	230	630	5	per ¼ recipe
Artichoke Pesto	39	100	75%	4	6	9	2	5	1	5	230	2	per 1/4 cup
Artichoke & Sausage Cakes	39	120	56%	7	9	7	2	3	1	50	420	2	per cake
Artichokes & Fava Beans	40	250	48%	11	28	14	2	10	2	0	320	10	per 1/6 recipe
Genuine Southern Biscuits	43	120	39%	2	15	5	2	2	1	5	200	1	per biscuit
Classic Scottish Shortbread	48	100	57%	1	10	6	4	2	0	15	20	0	per cookie
Peppered Shrimp	55	60	90%	1	1	6	1	2	3	10	90	0	per piece
Smoked Salmon Cucumber Rolls	55	15	42%	1	2	0.5	0	0	0.5	<5	105	0	per piece
Hoisin Beef & Scallion Rolls	55	50	64%	3	2	3.5	1.0	1.0	1.5	5	270	0	per piece
Tri-Color Polenta Cups	55	35	61%	1	2	2.5	1.5	0.5	0	5	125	0	per piece
Chicken Tostada Pequena	56	35	58%	1	2	2.0	0.5	0.5	1.0	5	70	0	per piece
Crabmeat-Avocado Quesadillas	56	50	56%	2	4	3.5	1.5	1.5	0.5	5	85	1	per piece
Boned Whole Trout with Mushrooms	61	420	55%	37	9	26	11	10	3	135	730	2	per 1/8 recipe
Rhubarb-Raspberry Galette	70	450	42%	5	62	21	13	6	2	55	105	4	per 1/8 recipe
Rhubarb-Ginger Fool	70	440	60%	3	45	30	18	9	2	110	40	2	
Rhubarb Compote with Oranges & Figs	71	440	1%	2	114	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	15	5	per 1/8 recipe
Apple-Rhubarb Crisp	71	430	30%	4	76	14	7	5	2	30	125	5	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

TIDBITS



The Real Way to Follow a Recipe

Before I became a recipe writer, I was an obedient recipe follower. If the instructions said to sauté for ten minutes, I set the timer and kept to the program. If the ingredient list called for one extravagant vinegar only available in a shop across town, I got in the car and drove—no questions asked. And if the last instruction was the strict admonition to "serve immediately," you wouldn't catch me dawdling.

For the most part, my good behavior paid off. My reward for following orders was more or less edible food for which I didn't have to take major responsibility. If something didn't work, it was the fault of the cookbook writer. That was before I became one.

Now, after writing a thousand recipes, I am constitutionally incapable of following one—even my own.

Just who is this lunatic insisting on julienning the vegetables when I have ten minutes to set the table?

As soon as I see a recipe now, I start scrutinizing: a little less cumin in the marinade perhaps; obviously the author forgot to toast the nuts; and just who does this has simply spent too much time in the kitchen. A handy rule: never follow a recipe written by someone who no longer chops his own onions.

Ingredient lists can give the

lunatic think she is insisting on julienning the vegetables when I have ten minutes to set the table and get dressed before the guests arrive?

Now that I know a recipe is no more permanent than a Polaroid snapshot, I find it absurd to follow one. Even the best recipes represent just one person's appetite on one particular day.

The best way to follow a recipe then is with a grain of salt—something like this.

Beginning with the title, a recipe is often pure salesmanship. Certain titles, especially cutes ones containing the word "best," should send up flares. If authors were honest, titles would read something like "My Best Effort at Veal

Chops So Far."

You can also save yourself time by looking at how the recipe is organized. If there are lots of parenthetical comments that begin "turn to page..." or more than one sauce that actually has to be cooked rather than poured from a bottle, stop and think before forging ahead and ruining a perfectly good day. These baroque creations are usually the product of some overwrought restaurant chef who

conscientious cook an anxiety attack. What will happen if I use two rather than three tablespoons of sugar in the muffins? Will my world fall apart if I substitute yogurt for sour cream in the chicken paprikash? As a person who has specified ingredients with the best of them, I have a confession to make. Often these choices were a matter of convenience, or even worse, ego.

What would you do if three tomatoes were staring you in the face, about to blacken in minutes? Or if your entire herb garden was about to be swallowed by a rampaging oregano plant? You would specify three tomatoes and a hell of a lot of oregano in the tomato concassée, wouldn't you?

Serving sizes remain the trickiest element of a recipe. A careful analysis of the author's photo and the dedication can go a long way towards illuminating those seemingly precise numbers. Is the author thin or fat? Does she live alone or cook for a big family? Lastly, where does the author live? Everyone knows that Californians eat smaller portions so they can live longer and wear Lycra well into middle age.

There are some people for whom following a recipe has never been a problem. A friend of mine, who can barely preheat an oven, called to congratulate me on a recipe in my latest cookbook—Fish in Achiote Sauce. She said it was terrific. Oh yes, she had trouble finding the achiote paste, so she just left it out. It's the creative types like her—and you know who you are—who were born knowing how to follow a recipe.

—Helene Siegel, Los Angeles, California ◆

90 FINE COOKING

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Horses pull the sled at the right pace for dumping sap buckets.

From Sap to Syrup

In northern New England, tap buckets hanging from maple trees are a sure sign that spring is on its way. Maple syrup season is short, with some trees giving up most of their perishable sap within a few hours, so harvesters work fast and furiously. Most large producers have abandoned traditional methods—with plastic tubing and reverseosmosis machines replacing buckets and wood fires—but small tappers still make their sweet, amber syrup by going from tree to tree.

Sap flows when roots start to thaw. A 100-year-old sugar maple can yield up to 30 gallons of sap.

In the sugarhouse, water is boiled off from the sap over wood fires. Ten gallons of sap are needed to make just one quart of maple syrup.